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"Did ye see the police?"

FURTHER EXPERIENCES OF AN IRISH R.M.

BY

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AND

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FURTHER EXPERIENCES OF AN IRISH R.M.

I

THE PUG-NOSED FOX

" 5 Turkies and their Mother
5 Ducks and the Drake
5 Hins and the Cock
CATHARINE O'DONOVAN, Skeagh."

A leaf from a copy-book, with these words written on it, was placed in my hand as I was in the act of dragging on a new pair of gloves in the stableyard. There was something rhythmic in the category, suggestive of burnt-offerings and incantations; some touch of pathos, pointing to tragedy; something, finally, that in the light of previous events recalled to me suddenly and unpleasantly my newborn position of Deputy M.F.H.

Not, indeed, that I was in need at that moment of circumstances to remind me of it. A new hunt-

ing-cap, pressing implacably upon my forehead, an equally new red coat, heavy as a coat of mail, a glittering horn, red hot from the makers, and so far totally unresponsive to my apoplectic wooings; these things in themselves, without the addition of a poultry bill, were sufficient to bring home to me my amazing folly in having succumbed to the wiles of Mr. Florence McCarthy Knox, and accepted the charge of his hounds, during his absence with the Irish Yeomanry at the South African war.

I had yielded in a burst of patriotic emotion to the spirit of volunteering that was in the air. It would be, Flurry had assured me, a purely nominal position.

"They'll only go out one day a week, and Jerome Hickey and Michael'll do all the work. I do secretary for myself, but that'll be no trouble to you. There's nothing at all to do but to send out the cards of the meets. It'll be a comfort to me to think you were running the show."

I suggested other names that seemed to me infinitely more comfortable, but found them blocked by intricate and insuperable objections, and when I became aware that Mr. Knox had so engineered his case as to get my wife on his side it seemed simpler to give in.

A week afterwards I saw Flurry off at the station. His last words to me were:

"Well, good-bye, Major. Be fighting my grand-

mother for her subscription, and whatever you do, don't give more than half-a-crown for a donkey. There's no meat on them."

Upon this touching farewell the train steamed out, and left me standing, shelterless, a reluctant and incapable Master of Hounds.

Exhaustive as Flurry's instructions had been on the subject of the cuisine and other details of kennel management, he had not even hinted at the difficulties that are usually composed by means of a fowl fund. My first experience of these had taken place but a week ago, when from the breakfast-table I had perceived a donkey and cart rambling, unattended, in the shrubberies, among the young hydrangeas and azaleas. The owner, a most respectable-looking old man, explained that he had left it there because he was "dilicate" to bring it up to the house, and added that he had come for compensation for "a beautiful milking goat" that the hounds had eaten last March, "and she having two kids that died afther her."

I asked why he had not long since been to Mr. Knox about it, and was favoured with an interminable history of the claimant's ill-health during the summer, consequent on his fretting after the goat; of how he had been anointed four times, and of how the donkey was lame this long while where a branch bet her in the thigh one day she ran into the wood from the hounds. Fearing that the donkey was about

to be included in the bill, I made haste to settle for the goat and her offspring, a matter of fifteen shillings.

Next day two women took up a position on the steps at luncheon time, a course which experience has taught me indicates affairs too exalted and too personal to be transmitted *viâ* the kitchen. They were, according to their own showing, ruined proprietors of poultry yards, in proof of which they pointed to a row of decapitated hens, laid forth on the grass like the bag at a fashionable shoot. I was irritably aware of their triumph in the trophy.

"Sure he didn't make off with anny of them only three, but he snapped the heads off all that was in it, and faith, if Masther Flurry was at home, he'd give us the blood of his arm before he'd see our little hins desthroyed on us this way."

I gave them thirty-two and sixpence as an alternative compensation, not, I admit, without an uneasy sense of something unusual in Peter Cadogan's expression, as he assiduously raked the gravel hard by.

It was Michael Leary, Flurry's Michael, who placed the matter of a fowl fund upon a basis. Catharine O'Donovan and her list of casualties had been dismissed at a cost of ten shillings, a price so inadequate, and so cheerfully accepted, as to confirm my dawning suspicions.

"Is it what would they get from Mr. Flurry?" replied Michael when I put the matter to him; "it

isn't ten shillings, no, nor thirty-two shillings that they'd get from him, but a pelt of a curse after their heels! Why wouldn't they keep their hens inside in the house with themselves at night, the same as annyone that'd have sense, and not to leave them out enticing the fox this way."

Michael was in a bad temper, and so, for the matter of that, was I, quite irrespective of dealings in poultry. Our red coats, our horses, and the presence of the hounds, did not betoken the chase, they merely indicated that the Hunt was about to be photographed. The local photographer, backed by Mrs. Sinclair Yeates, had extorted from me the privilege of "a sitting," a figurative expression, involving a ride of five miles to a covert, selected by my wife as being typical of the country, accompanied by the fourteen and a-half couple of half-bred harriers who figured in Hound Lists as "Mr. Knox's Foxhounds."

It was a blazing day in late August, following on forty-eight hours of blanketing sea-fog; a day for flannels and a languid game of croquet. Lady Jane, the grey mare lent to me by Flurry, had been demoralised by her summer at grass, and was in that peculiarly loathsome frame of mind that is a blend of laziness and bumptiousness. If I left her to her own devices she drowsed, stumbling, through the dust; if I corrected her, she pranced and pulled, and kicked up behind like a donkey. My huntsman,

Doctor Jerome Hickey, who was to have been in the forefront of the photograph, was twenty miles off in an open boat, on his way to an island at the far end of his dispensary district, with fifteen cases of measles ahead of him. I envied him; measles or no, he had on a turned down collar. As a result of his absence I rode in solitary dignity at the head of the pack, or, to speak more correctly, I preceded Michael by some thirty yards of unoccupied road, while the pack, callous to flogging, and disdainful of my cajoleries, clave to the heels of Michael's horse.

In this order we arrived at the tryst, a heathery hill-side, flanked by a dense and rambling wood. A sea-gull scream from the hill-side announced the presence of my wife, and summoned me to join her and the photographer at the spot where they were encamped. I put the mare at a suitable place in the wall by the roadside. She refused it, which was no more than I had expected. I sampled my new spurs on her fat sides, with the result that she charged the wall, slantways, at the exact spot where Philippa had placed her bicycle against it, missed the bicycle by a hair's-breadth, landed in the field with a thump, on all four feet, and ended with two most distressing bucks. It was a consolation to me, when I came in touch again with the saddle, to find that one of the new spurs had ploughed a long furrow in her shoulder.

The photographer was a young man from Belfast, a new comer to the neighbourhood; Philippa is also

a photographer, a fact that did not tend as much as might have been expected to the harmony of the occasion.

"Mrs. Yeates has selected this hillock," said Mr. McOstrich, in tones of acrid resignation, indicating as he spoke a sugar-loaf shaped knoll, thickly matted with furze and heather. "She considers the background characteristic. My own suggestion would have been the grass-field yonder."

It is an ancient contention of my wife that I, in common with all other men, in any dispute between a female relative and a tradesman, side with the tradesman, partly from fear, partly from masculine clannishness, and most of all from a desire to stand well with the tradesman. Nothing but the remembrance of this preposterous reproach kept me from accepting Mr. McOstrich's point of view, and, while I hesitated, Michael was already taking up his position on the hillock, perhaps in obedience to some signal from Philippa, perhaps because he had realised the excellent concealment afforded by the deep heather to his horse's fetlocks, whose outline was of a somewhat gouty type. It was part of Flurry Knox's demoniac gift for horseflesh that he should be able to buy screws and make them serve his exacting purposes. Michael's horse, Moses, had, at a distance, the appearance of standing upon four champagne bottles, but he none the less did the work of two sound horses and did it well.

I goaded Lady Jane through the furze, and established myself beside Michael on the sugar-loaf, the hounds disposed themselves in an interval of bracken below, and Mr. McOstrich directed his camera upon us from an opposite slope.

"Show your teeth, please," said Mr. McOstrich to Michael. Michael, already simmering with indignation at the senseless frivolity of the proceedings, glowered at his knuckles, evidently suspicious of an ill-timed pleasantry.

"Do you hear, Whip?" repeated Mr. McOstrich, raising his bleak northern voice, "show your teeth, please!"

"He only wants to focus us," said I, foreseeing trouble, and hurriedly displaying my own new front row in a galvanic smile.

Michael murmured to Moses' withers something that sounded like a promise to hocus Mr. McOstrich when occasion should serve, and I reflected on the hardship of having to feel apologetic towards both Michael and the photographer.

Only those who have participated in "Hunt Groups" can realise the combined tediousness and tension of the moments that followed. To keep thirty hounds headed for the camera, to ensure that your horse has not closed its eyes and hung its head in a doze of boredom, to preserve for yourself that alert and workmanlike aspect that becomes a sportsman, and then, when these things have been

achieved and maintained for what feels like a month, to see the tripod move in spider strides to a fresh position and know that all has to be begun over again. After several of these tentative selections of a site, the moment came when Mr. McOstrich swung his black velvet pall in the air and buried his head under its portentous folds. The hounds, though uneasy, had hitherto been comparatively calm, but at this manifestation their nerve broke, and they unanimously charged the glaring monster in the black hood with loud and hysterical cries.

Had not Michael perceived their intention while there was time awful things might have happened. As it was, the leaders were flogged off with ignominy, and the ruffled artist returned from the rock to which he had fled. Michael and I arranged ourselves afresh upon the hillock; I squared my shoulders, and felt my wonted photographic expression of hang-dog desperation settle down upon me.

"The dogs are not in the picture, Whip!" said Mr. McOstrich in the chill tone of outraged dignity.

I perceived that the hounds, much demoralised, had melted away from the slope in front of us, and were huddling in a wisp on the intervening hollow. Blandishments were of no avail; they wagged and beamed apologetically, but remained in the hollow. Michael, in whose sensitive bosom the term "Whip" evidently rankled, became scarlet in the face and avalanched from the hill-top upon his flock with a

fury that was instantly recognised by them. They broke in panic, and the astute and elderly Venus, followed by two of the young entry, bolted for the road. They were there met by Mr. McOstrich's carman, who most creditably headed the puppies with yells and his driving-whip, but was outplayed by Venus, who, dodging like a football professional, doubled under the car horse, and fled irrevocably. Philippa, who had been flitting from rock to rock with her kodak, and unnerving me with injunctions as to the angle of my cap, here entered the lists with a packet of sandwiches, with which, in spite of the mustard, she restored a certain confidence to the agitated pack, a proceeding observed from afar with trembling indignation by Minx, her fox terrier. By reckless expenditure of sandwich the hounds were tempted to their proper position below the horses, but, unfortunately, with their sterns to the camera, and their eyes fastened on Philippa.

"Retire, Madam!" said Mr. McOstrich, very severely, "*I* will attract the dogs!"

Thus rebuked, Madam scrambled hastily over the crest of the hillock and sank in unseemly laughter into the deep heather behind it.

"Now, very quiet, please," continued Mr. McOstrich, and then unexpectedly uttered the words, "Pop! Pop! Pop!" in a high soprano.

Michael clapped his hand over his mouth, the

superseded siren in the heather behind me wallowed in fresh convulsions; the hounds remained unattracted.

Then arose, almost at the same moment, a voice from the wood behind us, the voice of yet a third siren, more potent than that of either of her predecessors, the voice of Venus hunting a line. For the space of a breath the hounds hung on the eager hacking yelps, in the next breath they were gone.

Matters now began to move on a serious scale, and with a speed that could not have been foreseen. The wood was but fifty yards from our sugar-loaf. Before Michael had got out his horn, the hounds were over the wall; before the last stern had disappeared the leaders had broken into full cry.

"Please God it might be a rabbit!" exclaimed Michael, putting spurs to his horse and bucketing down through the furze towards the wood, with blasts of the horn that were fraught with indignation and rebuke.

An instant later, from my point of vantage on the sugar-loaf, I saw a big and very yellow fox cross an open space of heather high up on the hill above the covert. He passed and vanished; in half-a-dozen seconds Venus, plunging through the heather, came shrieking across the open space and also vanished. Another all too brief an interval, and the remainder

of the pack had stormed through the wood and were away in the open after Venus, and Michael, who had pulled up short on the hither side of the covert wall, had started up the open hill-side to catch them.

The characteristic background chosen by Philippa, however admirable in a photograph, afforded one of the most diabolic rides of my experience. Uphill, over courses of rock masked in furze bushes, round the head of a boggy lake, uphill again through deep and purple heather, over a horrid wall of long slabs half buried in it; past a ruined cabin, with thorn bushes crowding low over the only feasible place in the bank, and at last, the top of the hill, and Michael pulling up to take observations.

The best pack in the kingdom, schoolmastered by a regiment of whips, could not have precipitated themselves out of covert with more academic precision than had been shown by Flurry Knox's irregulars. They had already crossed the valley below us, and were running up a long hill as if under the conventional tablecloth; their cry, floating up to us, held all the immemorial romance of the chase.

Michael regarded me with a wild eye; he looked as hot as I felt, which was saying a good deal, and both horses were puffing.

"He's all the ways for Temple Braney!" he said. "Sure I know him well—that's the pug-nosed

fox that's in it these last three seasons, and it's what I wish——"

(I regret that I cannot transcribe Michael's wish in its own terms, but I may baldly summarise it as a desire minutely and anatomically specified that the hounds were eating Mr. McOstrich.)

Here the spurs were once more applied to Moses' reeking sides, and we started again, battering down the twists of a rocky lane into the steaming, stuffy valley. I felt as guilty and as responsible for the whole affair as Michael intended that I should feel; I knew that he even laid to my charge the disastrous appearance of the pug-nosed Temple Braney fox. (Whether this remarkable feature was a freak of nature, or of Michael's lurid fancy, I have never been able to ascertain.)

The valley was boggy, as well as hot, and the deep and sinuous ditch that by courtesy was supposed to drain it, was blind with rushes and tall fronds of Osmunda Regalis fern. Where the landing was tolerable, the take-off was a swamp, where the take-off was sound the landing was feasible only for a frog: we lost five panting minutes, closely attended by horse-flies, before we somehow floundered across and began the ascent of the second hill. To face tall banks, uphill, is at no time agreeable, especially when they are enveloped in a jungle of briars, bracken, and waving grass, but a merciful dispensation of cow-gaps revealed itself; it was one of the

few streaks of luck in a day not conspicuous for such.

At the top of the hill we took another pull. This afforded to us a fine view of the Atlantic, also of the surrounding country and all that was therein, with, however, the single unfortunate exception of the hounds. There was nothing to be heard save the summery rattle of a reaping-machine, the strong and steady rasp of a corn-crake, and the growl of a big steamer from a band of fog that was advancing, ghostlike, along the blue floor of the sea. Two fields away a man in a straw hat was slowly combing down the flanks of a haycock with a wooden rake. while a black and white cur slept in the young after-grass beside him. We broke into their sylvan tranquillity with a heated demand whether the hounds had passed that way. Shrill clamour from the dog was at first the only reply ; its owner took off his hat, wiped his forehead with his sleeve, and stared at us.

" I'm as deaf as a beetle this three weeks," he said, continuing to look us up and down in a way that made me realise, if possible, more than before, the absurdity of looking like a Christmas card in the heat of a summer's day.

" Did ye see the HOUNDS ? " shouted Michael, shoving the chestnut up beside him.

" It's the neurology I got," continued the haymaker, " an' the pain does be whistlin' out through

me ear till I could mostly run into the say from it."

"It's a pity ye wouldn't," said Michael, whirling Moses round, "an' stop in it! Whisht! Look over, sir! Look over!"

He pointed with his whip along the green slopes. I saw, about half a mile away, two boys standing on a fence, and beyond them some cattle galloping in a field: three or four miles farther on the woods of Temple Braney were a purple smear in the hazy heat of the landscape. My heart sank; it was obvious even to my limited capacities that the pug-nosed fox was making good his line with a straightness not to be expected from one of his personal peculiarity, and that the hounds were still running as hard as ever on a scent as steamingly hot as the weather. I wildly thought of removing my coat and leaving it in charge of the man with neuralgia, but was restrained by the reflection that he might look upon it as a gift, flung to him in a burst of compassion, a misunderstanding that, in view of his affliction, it would be impossible to rectify.

I picked up my lathered reins and followed Michael at a gloomy trot in the direction of the galloping cattle. After a few fields a road presented itself, and was eagerly accepted by the grey mare, on whom the unbridled gluttonies of a summer's grass were beginning to tell.

"She's bet up, sir," said Michael, dragging down a rickety gate with the handle of his whip. "Folly on the road, there's a near way to the wood from the cross."

Moses here walked cautiously over the prostrate gate.

"I'm afraid you'll kill Moses," said I, by no means pleased at the prospect of being separated from my Intelligence Department.

"Is it him?" replied Michael, scanning the country ahead of him with hawk eyes. "Sure he's as hardy as a throut!"

The last I saw of the trout was his bottle fetlocks disappearing nimbly in bracken as he dropped down the far side of a bank.

I "follied on the road" for two stifling miles. The heavy air was pent between high hedges hung with wisps of hay from passing carts; (hay-carrying in the south-west of Ireland conforms to the leisure of the farmer rather than to the accident of season;) phalanxes of flies arose as if at the approach of royalty, and accompanied my progress at a hunting jog, which, as interpreted by Lady Jane, was an effective blend of a Turkish bath and a churn.

The "near way" from the cross-roads opened seductively with a lane leading to a farmhouse, and presently degenerated into an unfenced but plausible cart track through the fields. Breaches had been made in the banks for its accommodation,

and I advanced successfully towards the long woods of Temple Braney, endeavouring, less successfully, to repel the attentions of two young horses, who galloped, squealed, and bucked round me and Lady Jane with the imbecile pleasantry of their kind. The moment when I at length slammed in their faces the gate of the wood, was one of sorely needed solace.

Then came the sudden bath of coolness and shade, and the gradual realisation that I did not in the least know what to do next. The air was full of the deeply preoccupied hum of insects, and the interminable monologue of a wood pigeon; I felt as if I ought to apologise for my intrusion. None the less I pursued a ride that crossed the wood, making persevering efforts to blow my horn, and producing nothing but gramophonic whispers, fragmentary groans, and a headache. I was near the farther side of the wood when I saw fresh hoof-tracks on a path that joined the ride; they preceded me to a singularly untempting bank, with a branch hanging over it and a potato-field beyond it. A clod had been newly kicked out of the top of it; I could not evade the conviction that Michael had gone that way. The grey mare knew it too, and bundled on to and over the bank with surprising celerity, and dropped skilfully just short of where the potato beds began. An old woman was digging at the other side of the field, and I steered for her,

making a long tack down a deep furrow between the "lazy-beds."

"Did you see the hounds, ma'am?" I called out across the intervening jungle of potato stalks.

"Sir!"

She at all events was not deaf. I amended my inquiry.

"Did you see any dogs, or a man in a red coat?"

"Musha, bad cess to them, then I did!" bawled the old woman, "look at the thrack o' their legs down thro' me little pratie garden! 'Twasn't but a whileen ago that they come leppin' out o' the wood to me, and didn't I think 'twas the Divil and all his young ones, an' I thrun meself down in the thrinch the way they wouldn't see me, the Lord save us!"

My heart warmed to her; I also would gladly have laid down among the umbrageous stalks of the potatoes, and concealed myself for ever from Michael and the hounds.

"What way did they go?" I asked, regretfully dismissing the vision, and feeling in my pocket for a shilling.

"They went wesht the road, your Honour, an' they screeching always; they crossed out the field below over-right the white pony, and faith ye couldn't hardly see Michael Leary for the shweat! God help ye asthore, yourself is getting hardship from them as well as another!"

The shilling here sank into her earthy palm, on which she prayed passionately that the saints might be surprised at my success. I felt that as far as I was concerned the surprise would be mutual; I had had nothing but misfortune since ten o'clock that morning, and there seemed no reason to believe that the tide had turned.

The pony proved to be a white mule, a spectral creature, standing in malign meditation trace-high in bracken; I proceeded in its direction at a trot, through clumps of bracken and coarse grass, and as I drew near it uttered a strangled and heart-broken cry of greeting. At the same moment Lady Jane fell headlong on to her nose and the point of her right shoulder. It is almost superfluous to observe that I did the same thing. As I rolled on my face in the bracken, something like a snake uncoiled itself beneath me and became taut; I clutched at it, believing it to be the reins, and found I was being hung up, like clothes on a line, upon the mule's tethering rope. Lady Jane had got it well round her legs, and had already fallen twice in her efforts to get up, while the mule, round whose neck the tether rope had been knotted, was backing hard, like a dog trying to pull its head through its collar.

In sunstroke heat I got out my knife, and having cut the rope in two places, an operation accomplished in the depths of a swarm of flies and midges, I pulled the mare on to her legs. She was lame on the off

fore, and the rope had skinned her shins in several places; my own shoulder and arm were bruised, and I had broken a stirrup leather. Philippa and the photographer had certainly provided me with a day of varied entertainment, and I could not be sure that I had even yet drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs.

I led Lady Jane out into the road, and considered the position. We were about nine miles from home, and at least five from any place where I could hire a car. To walk, and lead the mare, was an alternative that, powerless as events had proved me to be in the hands of misfortune, I still refused to consider. It was then given me to remember old McRory.

My acquaintance with old McRory was of the slightest. He was, it was understood, a retired Dublin coal merchant, with an enormous family, and a reputation for great riches. He had, within the last year or so, taken the derelict house of Temple Braney, and having by strenuous efforts attained that dubious honour, the Commission of the Peace, it had happened to me to sit on the Bench with him on one or two occasions. Of his family I knew little, save that whenever I saw an unknown young man buying cigarettes at Mr. Dannaher's in Skebawn, I was informed that it was one of the young McRorys, a medical student, and "a bit of a lad, but nothing at all to the next

youngest." The Misses McRory were only occasionally viewed, whirling in large companies on glittering bicycles, and the legend respectfully ran that they had forty blouses apiece. Perhaps the most definite information about them was supplied by our cook, Mrs. Cadogan, who assured Philippa that Wild Pigs in America wouldn't be treated worse than what Mrs. McRory treated her servants. All these things together made an unpromising aggregate, but the fact remained that Temple Braney House was within a quarter of a mile of me, and its charity my only hope.

The lodge gates of Temple Braney were wide open, so was the door of the lodge; the weedy drive was scored with fresh wheel-tracks, as also, for the matter of that, was the grass on either side. I followed it for a short distance, in the roomy shade of splendid beech-trees, servants of the old régime, preserving their dignity through the vicissitudes of the new. Near the house was a second open gate, and on a species of arch over it I was amazingly greeted by the word "Welcome" in white letters on a blazing strip of Turkey-red. This was an attention that I had not anticipated; did it mean a school-feast?

I made a cautious survey, but saw nobody, and nerved by the increasing lameness of Lady Jane, I went on to the house and rang the bell. There was no response; the hall-door was wide open,

and from an inner hall two lanky red setter puppies advanced with their tails between their legs, barking uncertainly, and acutely conscious of the fact that upon the collar of each was fastened a flaunting though much chewed bow of white satin ribbon. Full of foreboding I rang again. The bell tinkled vigorously in some fastness of the house, but nothing else happened. I decided to try the stable-yard, and, attended by the decorated puppies, set forth to find it.

It was a large quadrangle, of which one side was formed by a wing of the house; had there been a few more panes of glass in the windows and slates in the roof it might have been imposing. A cavernous coachhouse stood open, empty save for the wheelless body of an outside car that was seated on the floor, with wings outspread like a hatching hen. Every stable-door gaped wide. Odds and ends of harness lay about, but neither horse nor human being was visible. A turkey-cock, in transports of wrath, stormed to and fro in front of his household, and to some extent dispelled the sentiment of desertion and stampede that pervaded the place. I led the limping mare into a stable wherein were two loose-boxes. A sickly smell greeted me, and I perceived that in one of the boxes was a long low cage, alive with the red-currant-jelly eyes and pink noses of a colony of ferrets, and in the other was a pile of empty wine-boxes and several

bicycles. Lady Jane snorted heavily, and I sought elsewhere for a refuge for her. I found it at length in a long stable with six empty stalls, and proceeded to tie her up in one of them.

It was while I was thus engaged that a strange succession of sounds began overhead, heavy, shapeless sounds in which were blended the suggestions of shove and thump. There was a brief interval of silence, during which Lady Jane and I listened with equal intentness; then followed a hoarse bellow, which resolved itself into the inquiry,

"Is there any one there?"

Here was the princess of the enchanted palace waking up with a vengeance. More and angrier bellows followed; I went stealthily out into the yard, and took stock of the windows above the stable. One of them was open, and it was from it that the voice issued, loudly demanding release. It roared a string of Christian names, which I supposed to be those of the McRory family, it used most unchristian language, and it finally settled down into shouts for help, and asseverations that it was smothering. I admit that my first and almost overwhelming impulse was to steal a bicycle and wing my way to my far-away and peaceful home, leaving Michael, the hounds, and the smothering gentleman to work out their own salvation. Unfortunately for me, the voice of conscience prevailed. There was a ladder near

at hand leaning against the wall, and I put it to the window, and went up it as fast as my top boots would allow me, with a vision before me of old McRory in apoplexy as the probable reward of my labours. I thrust my head in, blocking the light in so doing; the shouting ceased abruptly, and after the glare of sunshine outside I could at first see nothing. Then was revealed to me a long and darksome room, once, probably, a loft, filled with broken chairs and varieties of primeval lumber. In the middle of the floor lay an immense feather bed, and my bewildered eyes discovered, at one end of it, a crimson face, the face, not of old McRory but that of a young gentleman of my acquaintance, one Mr. Tomsy Flood of Curranhilty. The mysteries were deepening. I straddled the window-sash, and arrived in the room with a three-cornered tear in the shoulder of my coat, inflicted by a nail in the frame, and one spur draped with ancestral cobweb.

"Take me out of this!" howled Mr. Flood hysterically, accepting my pantomime entrance without question. "Can't you see I'm smothering in this damned thing?"

Fluff hung from his black moustache and clung to his eyebrows, his hair was full of feathers; earthquake throes convulsed the feather-bed, and the fact was suddenly revealed to me that Mr. Flood was not under it, as I had at first imagined, but in it, stitched in, up to the chin. The weaned

child, or any other conventional innocent, could not have failed for an instant to recognise the handiwork of practical humorists of a high order. I asked no questions, but got out my knife once more, and beginning with due precaution somewhere near Mr. Flood's jugular vein, proceeded to slit open the end of the "tick." The stitches were long and strong, and as each one yielded, the feathers burst forth in stifling puffs, and Tomsy Flood's allusions to the young McRorys were mercifully merged in sputtering. I did not laugh, not at least till I found that I had to drag him out like a mummy, accompanied by half the contents of the bed, and perceived that he was in full evening clothes, and that he was incapable of helping himself because the legs of his trousers were sewn together and his coat-sleeves sewn to his sides; even then, I only gave way in painful secrecy behind the mighty calves of his legs as I cut the stitches out. Tomsy Flood walked about fifteen stone and was not in a mood to be trifled with, still less to see the humour of the position. The medical students had done their work with a surgical finish, and by the time that I had restored to Tomsy the use of his legs and arms, the feathers had permeated to every recess of my being, and I was sneezing as if I had hay fever.

Having at length, and with considerable difficulty, got Mr. Flood on to his legs, I ventured, with the

tact demanded by the situation, a question as to whether he had been dining at Temple Braney.

"Dining?" queried Mr. Flood, with an obvious effort of memory. "Yes, I was, to be sure! Amn't I staying in the house?" Then, with an equally obvious shock of recollection, "Sure I'm Best Man at the wedding to-day!"

The scattered elements of the situation began to fall symmetrically into line, from the open gates to the white bows on the puppies' collars. My chief concern, however, bearing in mind Tomsy Flood's recent potations and provocations, was to let him down as easily as possible, and, reserving my conclusions to myself, to escape, swiftly and silently, while yet there was time. There was always that stall full of bicycles; I could borrow clothes from Tomsy, and leave this accursed tom-foolery of hunting kit to be fetched with the mare, I could write a beautifully explanatory note when I got home——

"Hadn't you better get out of your evening things as quickly as you can?" I suggested.

Mr. Flood regarded me with heavy and blood-shot eyes of imperfect intelligence.

"Oh! I've time enough. Ye wouldn't get a pick of breakfast here before ten o'clock in the day. Now that I come to look into you," he continued, "you're as big a show as myself! Is it for the wedding that you have the red coat on you?"

I do not now remember with what lies I composed Tomsy Flood, but I got him out of the room at last by a door into a passage of seemingly interminable length; he took my arm, he treated me as his only friend, he expressed his full confidence that I would see fair play when he got a hold of Stanley McRory. He also gave it as his private opinion that his cousin, Harry Flood, was making a hare of himself marrying that impudent little Pinkie McRory, that was as vulgar as a bag of straddles, in spite of the money. Indeed, the whole family had too many airs about them for his fancy. "They take the English *Times*, if you please, and they all dress for dinner—every night I tell ye! I call that rot, y'know!"

We were all this time traversing the house by labyrinthine passages, flights of stairs, and strange empty lobbies; we progressed conversationally and with maddening slowness, followed by a fleecy train of feathers that floated from us as we went. And all the time I was trying to remember how long it took to get married. In my own case it seemed as if I had been in the church for two hours at least.

A swing-door suddenly admitted us to the hall, and Tomsy stood still to collect his faculties.

"My room's up there," he began, pointing vaguely up the staircase.

At this identical moment there was a loud and composite crash from behind a closed door on

our right, followed by minor crashes, and noises as of chairs falling about.

"That's the boys!" said Tomsy, a sudden spark kindling in his eye; "they're breakfasting early, I suppose."

He dropped my arm unexpectedly, and flung the door open with a yell.

The first object that met my eyes was the original sinner, Venus, mounted on a long and highly-adorned luncheon table, cranching and gulping cold chicken as fast as she could get it down; on the floor half-a-dozen of her brethren tore at a round of beef amid the débris of crockery and glass that had been involved in its overthrow. A cataract of cream was pouring down the table-cloth, and making a lake on the carpet for the benefit of some others; and President, the patriarch of the pack, was apparently seated on the wedding-cake, while he demolished a cold salmon. I had left my whip in the stable, but even had this paralysing sight left me the force to use it, its services would not have been needed. The leaders of the revel leaped from the table, mowing down colonies of wine-glasses in the act, and fled through the open window, followed by the rest of the party, with a precipitancy that showed their full consciousness of sin—the last scramblers over the sill yelping in agonised foretaste of the thong that they believed was overtaking them.

At such a moment of catastrophe the craving for human sympathy is paramount.

I turned even to the fuddled and feathered Tomsy Flood as to a man and a brother, and was confronted in the doorway by the Bride and Bridegroom.

Behind them, the hall was filling, with the swiftness of an evil dream, with glowing faces and wedding bonnets; there was a turmoil of wheels and hoofs at the door, and through it all, like "horns of Elfland faintly blowing," Michael's blasts of summons to his pirates. Finally, the towering mauve bonnet and equally towering wrath of Mrs. McRory, as she advanced upon me and Tomsy Flood. I thought of the Wild Pigs in America, and wished I were with them.

Lest I should find myself the object of a sympathy more acute than I deserve, it may be well to transcribe portion of a paragraph from the *Curranhilty Herald* of the following week:—

". . . After the ceremony a reception was held at Temple Braney House, where a sumptuous collation had been provided by the hospitable Mr. and Mrs. McRory. The health of the Happy Pair having been drunk, that of the Bridesmaids was proposed, and Mr. T. Flood, who had been prevented by a slight indisposition from filling the office of Best Man, was happily sufficiently recovered to return

thanks for them in his usual sprightly vein. Major Sinclair Yeates, R.M., M.F.H., who, in honour of the festive occasion had donned sporting attire, proposed the health of the Bride's Mother in felicitous terms. . . ."

II

A ROYAL COMMAND

WHEN I heard that Bernard Shute, of Clountiss, Esquire, late Lieutenant R.N., was running an Agricultural Show, to be held in his own demesne, I did not for a moment credit him with either philanthropy or public spirit. I recognised in it merely another outbreak of his exasperating health and energy. He bombarded the country with circulars, calling upon farmers for exhibits, and upon all for subscriptions; he made raids into neighbouring districts on his motor car, turning vague promises into bullion, with a success in mendicancy fortunately given to few. It was in a thoroughly ungenerous spirit that I yielded up my guinea and promised to attend the Show in my thousands: peace at twenty-one shillings was comparatively cheap, and there was always a hope that it might end there.

The hope was fallacious: the Show boomed; it blossomed into a Grand Stand, a Brass Band, and Afternoon Tea Tent; finally, fortune, as usual, played into Bernard's hands and sent a Celebrity. There arrived in a neighbouring harbour a steam-

yacht, owned by one of Mr. Shute's dearest friends, one Captain Calthorpe, and having on board a coloured potentate, the Sultan of X——, who had come over from Cowes to see Ireland and the Dublin Horse Show. The dearest friend—who, as it happened, having been for three days swathed in a wet fog from the Atlantic, was becoming something pressed for entertainment for his charge—tumbled readily into Bernard's snare, and paragraphs appeared with all speed in the local papers proclaiming the intention of H.H. the Sultan of X—— to be present at the Clountiss Agricultural Show. Following up this coup, Bernard achieved for his function a fine, an even sumptuous day, and the weather and the Sultan between them filled the Grand Stand beyond the utmost hopes (and possibly the secret misgivings) of its constructors.

Having with difficulty found seats on the topmost corner for myself, my wife, and my two children, I had leisure to speculate upon its probable collapse. For half an hour, for an hour, for an hour and a half, we sat on its hot bare boards and surveyed the wide and empty oval of grass that formed the arena of the Show. Five " made-up " jumps of varying dimensions and two vagrant fox-terriers were its sole adornment. A dark rim of spectators encircled it, awaiting developments, *i.e.* the arrival of the Sultan, with tireless patience, and the egregious Slipper, attired in a gala costume of tall

hat, frock-coat, white breeches, and butcher boots, gleanings, no doubt, from bygone jumble sales, swaggered and rolled to and fro, selling catalogues and cards of the jumping. Away under the tall elms near the gate, amid the rival clamour of the cattle sheds and the poultry pens, was stationed the green and yellow band of the "Sons of Liberty"; at intervals it broke into an excruciating shindy of brass instruments, through which the big drum drove a ferocious and unfaltering course. Above the heads of the people, at the far end of the arena, tossing heads and manes moving ceaselessly backwards and forwards told where the "jumping horses" were waiting, eaten by flies, inconsolably agitated by the band, becoming momently more jaded and stale from the delay. I thanked Heaven that neither my wife nor Bernard Shute had succeeded in inducing me to snatch my string of two from the paddock in which they were passing the summer, to take part in this purgatorial procession.

The Grand Stand, a structure bare as a mountain top to the assaults of sun and wind, was canopied with parasols and prismatic with millinery. The farmers, from regions unknown to me, had abundantly risen to the occasion; so also had their wives and daughters; and fashionable ladies, with comfortable brogues and a vigorous taste in scent, closed us in on every side. Throughout that burning period of delay went the searching catechisms of

my two sons (aged respectively four and seven) as to the complexion, disposition, and domestic arrangements of the Sultan. Philippa says that I ought to have known that they were thoroughly overstrung; possibly my descriptions of the weapons that he wore and the cannibal feasts that he attended were a trifle lurid, but it seemed simpler to let the fancy play on such details than to decide, for the benefit of an interested *entourage* of farmers' daughters, whether the Sultan's face was the colour of my boots or of their mother's, and whether he had a thousand or a million wives. The inquiry was interrupted by the quack of a motor horn at the entrance gate.

"Here he is!" breathed the Grand Stand as one man. There was a flocking of stewards towards the gate, and the Sons of Liberty, full of anxiety to say the suitable thing, burst into the melancholy strains of "My Old Kentucky Home Far Away." To this somewhat "hearse-like air" the group of green-rosetted stewards advanced across the arena, escorting the yacht party, in whose midst moved a squat figure, clad in grey flannel, and surmounted by a massive and snowy turban. My elder son became very pale; the younger turned an ominous crimson, and the corners of his mouth went down, slowly, but, as I well knew, fatally. The inevitable bellow, that followed in the inevitable routine, had scarcely died away in the heart of Philippa's feather

boa, when Mr. Shute's red face and monstrous Presidential rosette presented themselves on the stairs at my elbow.

"Mrs. Yeates!" he began, in a gusty whisper, "Cecilia implores you to come and fling yourself to the Lion! She says she simply can't and won't tackle him single-handed, and she trusts to you to see her through! He talks French all right, and I know your French is top-hole! Do come——"

Incredible as it may appear, my wife received this suggestion with a reluctance that was obviously but half-hearted. Such it is to have the Social Gift.

I presently found myself alone with my offspring, both in tears, and deaf to my assurances that neither the Sultan, nor his lion, would eat their mother. Consolation, however, came with the entry of the "jumping horses" into the arena, which followed with all speed upon that of the Sultan. The first competitor bucketed up to the starting-point, and at the same moment the discovery was made that there was no water in the water-jump, a space of perhaps a foot in depth by some five feet wide. Nothing but a thin paste of mud remained, the water having disappeared, unnoticed, during the hot hours of the morning.

Swift in expedient, the stewards supplied the deficiency with quicklime, which was scattered with a lavish hand in the fosse, and shone like snow

through the barrier of furze bushes on the take-off side. If, as I suppose, the object was to delude the horses into the belief that it was a water-jump, it was a total failure; they immediately decided that it was a practical joke, dangerous, and in indifferent taste. If, on the other side, a variety entertainment for the public was aimed at, nothing could have been more successful. Every known class of refusal was successfully exhibited. One horse endeavoured to climb the rails into the Grand Stand; another, having stopped dead at the critical point, swung round, and returned in consternation to the starting-point, with his rider hanging like a locket round his neck. Another, dowered with a sense of humour unusual among horses, stepped delicately over the furze bushes, and, amidst rounds of applause, walked through the lime with a stoic calm. Yet another, a ponderous war-horse of seventeen hands, hung, trembling like an aspen, on the brink, till a sympathiser, possibly his owner, sprang irrepressibly from his seat on the stand, climbed through the rails, and attacked him from behind with a large umbrella. It was during this three-cornered conflict that the green-eyed filly forced herself into the front rank of events. A chorus of "Hi! Hi! Hi!" fired at the rate of about fifty per second, volleyed in warning from the crowd round the starting-point, and a white-legged chestnut, with an unearthly white face

and flying flounces of tawny mane and tail, came thundering down at the jump. Neither umbrella nor war-horse turned her by a hair's-breadth from her course, still less did her rider, a lean and long-legged country boy, whose single object was to keep on her back. Picking up her white stockings, she took off six feet from the jump, and whizzed like a driven grouse past the combatants and over the furze bushes and the lime. Beneath her creamy forelock, I caught a glimpse of her amazing blue-green eyes.

She skimmed the hurdle, she flourished over the wall, flinging high her white heels with a twist that showed more consideration for their safety than that of her rider. She ramped over the big double bank, while the roars of approval swelled with each achievement, and she ended a faultless round by bolting into the heart of the crowd, which fled hilariously, and, as hilariously, hived in round her again.

From my exalted seat I could see the Sultan clapping his hands in sweet accord with Philippa. Somewhere near me a voice yelled :

" Cripes ! She's a monkey ! When she jumped the wall she went the height of a tree over it ! "

To which another voice replied that " It'd be a good bird that'd fly the height she wouldn't lep. and John Cullinane'd be apt to get first with her at the Skebawn Show." I remembered

casually that John Cullinane was a neighbour of mine.

"Well, I wouldn't fancy her at all," said a female voice. "I'd say she had a very maleecious glance."

"Ah! ye wouldn't feel that when the winkers'd be on her," said the first speaker; "she'd make a fine sweeping mare under a side-car."

Meantime, the war-horse, much embittered by the umbrella, floundered through the lime, and, continuing his course, threw down the hurdle, made a breach in the wall that would, as my neighbour put it, give three hours' work to seven idlers, and came to a sudden conclusion in front of the bank, while his rider slowly turned a somersault that, by some process of evolution, placed him sitting on the fence, facing the large and gloomy countenance of his horse.

It was after this performance that my wife looked round to see if her sons were enjoying themselves, and waved her handkerchief. The snowy turban of the Sultan moved round too, and beneath its voluminous folds the round, black discs of a pair of field-glasses were directed at us. The effect was instant. With a simultaneous shriek of terror, my children flung themselves upon me and buried their faces in my breast. I shall never forget it to the farmers' daughters that, in this black hour, their sympathy was prompt and practical.

"Oh! Fie, fie! Oh! the creatures! 'Twas the

spy-glasses finished them altogether! Eat a sweetie now, lovey! that's the grand man! Pappy'll not let the dirty fella near ye!"

A piece of the brown sugar-stick, known as "Peggy's leg," accompanied these consolations, and a tearful composure was gradually restored; but "Pappy" had arrived at the conclusion that he had had about as much as he could stand. In shameful publicity I clambered down the steep tiers of seats, with one child under my arm, the other adhering to my coat-tail. Philippa made agitated signals to me; I cut her dead, and went to ground in the tea tent.

A couple of days later my duty took me to the farthest end of my district—a matter that involved a night's absence from home. I left behind me an infant family restored to calm, and a thoroughly domesticated wife and mother, pledged to one o'clock dinner with the children and tea in the woods. I returned in time for luncheon next day, bicycling from the station, as was my wont. It was a hot day, and as I walked my bicycle up the slope of the avenue, the shade of the beech trees was passing pleasant; the dogs galloped to meet me over the soft after-grass, and I thought about flannels and an idle afternoon.

In the hall I met Margaret, the parlour-maid, engaged, with the housemaid, in carrying the writing-table out of my smoking-room. They were

talking loudly to each other, and I noticed that their eyes were very bright and their complexions considerably above par. I am a man of peace, but the veriest dove will protect its nest, and I demanded with some heat the cause of this outrage.

"The Mistress told us to clear this room for the servant of the—the gentleman that's coming to lunch to-morrow, sir," replied Margaret, with every appearance of offence.

She and Hannah staggered onwards with my table, and the contents of the drawers rolled and rattled.

"Put down that table," I said firmly. "Where is the Mistress?"

"I believe she's dressing, sir," replied Margaret; "she only came home about an hour ago. She was out all night on the sea, I believe."

Instant on the heels of these astonishing statements the swing door to the kitchen was flung open, and Mrs. Cadogan's angry voice was projected through it.

"Hannah! go tell the Mistress the butcher's below, and he says he never heard tell of the like, and would she lend him one o' the Major's spears? How would the likes o' him have a spear! Such goings on!"

"What the devil is all this about?" I said, with an equal anger. "No one is to touch my spears!"

"Thanks be to God, the Major's come home!"

exclaimed the ruler of the kitchen, advancing weightily into the hall. "There's no fear I'd put a hand on your spears, sir, nor the butcher neither, the poor, decent man! He says he's supplying the gentry for twenty-five years, and he was never asked to do the like of a nasty thing like that!"

"Like *what!*" I said, with growing wrath and bewilderment.

"It's what the Mistress said," rejoined Mrs. Cadogan, the flush of injury mounting to her cap-frill. "That what-shall-I-call-him—that King, wouldn't ate mate without it'd be speared! And it's what I say," she went on, perorating loudly and suddenly, "what's good enough for Christians and gentry is good enough for an owld Blackamoor!"

It was now sufficiently obvious that Philippa had, with incredible perfidy, taken advantage of my absence to embroil herself in the entertainment of barbaric royalty. "Tell the butcher to wait," was all I could trust myself to say, as I started in search of my wife.

"Wait, Sinclair! I'm coming down!" cried an urgent voice from the upper landing, and Philippa, attired in what I may perhaps describe as a tempestuous dressing-gown, came swiftly downstairs and swept me before her into the drawing-room.

"My dear," she said breathlessly, "let me break it to you as gently as possible. The Shutes called for me in the motor after you left yesterday, and we

went on board Bernard's yacht and sailed round to tea with Captain Calthorpe and the Sultan. We were becalmed coming back, and we were out all night—we had nothing to eat but the men's food —not that I wanted anything!" She gave a nauseated shudder of reminiscence. "There was an awful swell. It rained, too. Cecilia and I tried to sleep in the cabin with all our clothes on; I never spent a more horrible night. The yacht crawled in with the tide at about ten o'clock this morning, and I got back here half-dead, and was just going up to bed when Captain Calthorpe arrived on a car and said that the Sultan wanted to lunch here to-morrow. He says we *must* have him—it's a kind of Royal command—in fact, I suppose you *ought* to wear your frock-coat!"

"I'm dashed if I do!" I said, with decision.

"Well, be that as it may," resumed Philippa, discreetly evading this point, "that green-eyed thing that got the first prize for jumping is to be here to meet him. He wants to buy it for his State carriage. I did my best to get out of it, and I told Captain Calthorpe it would be impossible to manage about the food. I forgot to tell you," faltered Philippa, with a wan giggle, "that he said he must have speared mutton!"

"I call it an infernal liberty of Calthorpe's!" I said, with indignation fanned by the spectacle of Philippa's sleepless black-rimmed eyes and pallid

face, " dumping his confounded menagerie upon us in this way ! And I may tell you that those spears of mine are poisoned ! "

" Oh ! don't be so horrid, Sinclair," said Philippa, " inventing difficulties like that ! "

I arose the following morning with a heart of lead —of boiling lead—as I went down early to the smoking-room to look for cigarettes and found that they, in common with every other thing that I wanted, had been tidied into oblivion. From earliest dawn I had heard the thumping of feet, and the swish of petticoats, and the plying of brooms ; but for me the first shot of the engagement was not fired till 8.30, when, as I was moodily stropping my razor, I was told that John Cullinane was below, and would be thankful to see me. As I shaved, I could see John Cullinane standing about in front of the house, in his Sunday clothes, waiting for me ; and I knew that he would so wait, patiently, inexorably, if I did not come down till noonday.

I interviewed him, unsympathetically, on the hall door steps, and told him, firstly, that, as I knew nothing of his filly, I could not " say a good word " to the Sultan for her ; and, secondly, that I certainly would not mention to the Sultan that, in my opinion, she was a cheap mare at £80. John Cullinane then changed the conversation by remarking that he had brought over a small little donkey for a present for the young gentlemen ; to

which, with suitable politeness, I responded that my children already had a donkey, and that I could not think of depriving him of his, and the interview closed.

Breakfast was late, and for the most part uneatable, the excitement of the household having communicated itself to the kitchen-range.

"If I was to put my head under it, it wouldn't light for me!" Mrs. Cadogan said to Philippa.

As a matter of fact, judging by a glimpse vouchsafed to me of her face as I struggled forth from the cellar with a candle and the champagne, one might have expected it to cause a conflagration anywhere.

My smoking-room had been dedicated to the Sultan's personal attendant, a gentleman who could neither lunch with his master nor with my servants; I was therefore homeless, and crept, an outcast, to the drawing-room to try to read the newspaper undisturbed. Sounds from above told me that trouble was brewing in the nursery; I closed the door.

At about eleven-thirty an outside car drove up to the house, and I saw a personable stranger descend from it, with a black bag in his hand, a forerunner, no doubt, of the Sultan, come over to see that the preparations were *en règle*. I saw no reason for my intervention, and, with a passing hope that Providence might deliver him over to Mrs. Cadogan

I returned to my paper. The door was flung open.

"Sinclair, dear," said my wife, very apologetically, "here is Mr. Werner, the piano-tuner, from Dublin. He says he can't come again—he thinks he can finish it by luncheon-time. I quite forgot that he was coming——"

Mr. Werner's spectacled and supercilious face regarded me over her shoulder; he evidently had a low opinion of me, I do not know why. With one Cenci-like glance of reproach at Philippa, I rose and left the room. As I put on my cap I heard the first fierce chords break forth, followed by the usual chromatic passages, fluent and searching, which merged in their turn into a concentrated attacl upon a single note. I hurried from the house.

It was a perfect August morning; the dogs lay on the hot gravel and panted politely as I spoke to them, but did not move. Rejected by all, I betook myself to a plantation near the front gate to see how the work of clearing a ride was progressing. The cross-cut saw and a bill-hook lay on the ground, but of workmen there was no sign. From the high road came the sound of wheels and of rapid trotting, also something that seemed like cheering.

"Good heavens!" I thought, my blood running cold, "here they are!"

I broke through the tall bracken and the larches to an opening from which the high road was visible.

My two workmen were lying on their stomachs across the coping of the demesne wall, and a line of countrymen, with their best clothes on and crape "weepers" on their hats, sat on the opposite fence and applauded what was apparently a trotting match between a long-legged bay colt and John Cullinane's chestnut filly, owners up.

I joined the entertainment, my two men melting like snow from the top of the wall, and it was explained to me that there had been a funeral in the locality, and that these were a few of the neighbours that had been at it, and were now waiting to see the Black Gentleman. An outside car rested on its shafts by the side of the road, and a horse with harness on it browsed voraciously on the shrubs inside my gate. Far away down the road I saw the receding figures of my two children, going forth to the picnic that had been arranged to allay their panic and to remove them from the sphere of action. Any Irish person will readily believe that one of them was mounted on "the small little donkey," the bribe which I had that morning irrevocably repudiated. I knew that John Cullinane saw them too, but I was too broken to interfere; I turned my back and walked rapidly away.

The rhythmic rasp of the cross-cut told me that work at the clearing had been resumed; I said to myself vindictively that I would see that it continued, and returned to the ride. The bill-hook was

doing nothing, and picking it up I fell to snicking and chopping, with soothing destructiveness, among the briars and ash-saplings. Notwithstanding heat and horse-flies, the time passed not disagreeably, and I was, at all events, out of range of the piano. I had paused for the fifteenth time to wipe a heated brow, and extract a thorn from my finger, when the familiar voice of the Shutes' motor-horn roused me to the appalling fact that it was nearly luncheon-time, and that I was far from fit to receive Royalty. As I hurriedly emerged from the wood, there was a sound of hard galloping, and I beheld the green-eyed filly flying riderless up the avenue. She crossed the croquet ground, thoroughly, from corner to corner, and disappeared into the shrubbery in the direction of the flower garden. I ran as I have seldom run, dimly aware of a pursuing party of mourners on the avenue behind me, and, as I ran, I cursed profusely the Sultan, Calthorpe, and chiefly Bernard Shute and all his works.

The chase lasted for twenty minutes, and was joined in by not less than five-and-thirty people. The creamy mane of the filly floated like a banner before us through the shrubberies, with the dogs in full cry behind her; through it all went the reiterations of the piano, the monotonous hammerings, the majestic chords, the pyrotechnic scales; they expressed as fully as he himself could have desired the complete indifference of the tuner.

The filly was ubiquitous: at one moment she was in the flower garden, the next, a distant uproar among the poultry told that she had traversed the yard, whence she emerged, *ventre-à-terre*, delivered herself of three bucks at sight of her original enemy the motor, at the hall door, and was away again for the croquet ground. At every turn I encountered a fresh pursuer; it was Bernard Shute and the kitchenmaid who slammed the flower-garden gate in her face; it was Philippa, in her very best dress, abetted by John Cullinane, very dusty, and waving a crushed and weepered hat, who, with the best intentions, frustrated a brilliant enveloping movement directed by me; finally the cross-cut saw men, the tuner's car-driver, and a selection from the funeral, came so near cornering her that she charged the sunk fence, floated across its gulf with offensive ease, and scurried away, with long and defiant squeals, to assault my horses at the farther end of the paddock.

When we—*i.e.* Philippa, Bernard, and I—pulled ourselves together on the top of the steps, it was two o'clock. By the special favour of Providence the Sultan was late, but the position was desperate. Philippa had trodden on the front of her dress and torn it, Bernard had greened the knees of his trousers; I do not know what I looked like, but when Cecilia Shute emerged, cool and spotless, from the hall, where she had judiciously remained during the pro-

ceedings, she uttered a faint shriek and covered her face with her hands.

"I know," I said, with deadly calm, stuffing my tie inside my waistcoat, "I can't help it——"

"Here they are!" said Bernard.

The sound of wheels was indeed in the avenue. We fled as one man into the back hall, and Philippa, stumbling over her torn flounce, fell on her knees at the feet of Mr. Werner, the tuner, who stood there, his task finished, awaiting with cold decorum the reward of his labours. The wheels stopped. What precisely happened during that crowded moment I cannot pretend to explain, but as we dragged my wife to her feet I found that she had knelt on my eyeglass, with the result that may be imagined.

All was now lost save honour. I turned at bay, and dimly saw, silhouetted in the open doorway, a short figure in a frock-coat, with a species of black turban on its head. I advanced, bowed, and heroically began:

"Sire! J'ai l'honneur——"

"Yerrah my law! Major!" said the bewildered voice of Slipper. "Don't be making game of me this way! Sure I have a tallagram for you." He removed the turban, which I now perceived to be a brown tweed cap, swathed in a crape "weeper," and handed me the telegram. "I got it from the boy that was after breaking his bike on the road, an' I coming from the funeral."

The telegram was from Calthorpe, and said, with suitable regrets, that the Sultan had been summoned to London on instant and important business.

I read it to the back hall, in a voice broken by many emotions.

"I saw the gentleman you speak of waiting for the Dublin train at Sandy Bay Station this morning," remarked the tuner, condescending for a moment to our level.

"Then why did you not tell us so?" demanded Philippa, with sudden indignation.

"I was not aware, madam, that it was of any importance," replied Mr. Werner, returning to his normal altitude of perpetual frost.

Incredible as it may seem, it was apparent that Philippa was disappointed. As for me, my heart was like a singing bird.

III

POISSON D'AVRIL

THE atmosphere of the waiting-room set at naught at a single glance the theory that there can be no smoke without fire. The stationmaster, when remonstrated with, stated, as an incontrovertible fact, that any chimney in the world would smoke in a south-easterly wind, and, further, said there wasn't a poker, and that if you poked the fire the grate would fall out. He was, however, sympathetic, and went on his knees before the smouldering mound of slack, endeavouring to charm it to a smile by subtle proddings with the handle of the ticket-punch. Finally, he took me to his own kitchen fire and talked politics and salmon-fishing, the former with judicious attention to my presumed point of view, and careful suppression of his own, the latter with no less tactful regard for my admission that for three days I had not caught a fish, while the steam rose from my wet boots, in witness of the ten miles of rain through which an outside car had carried me.

Before the train was signalled I realised for the hundredth time the magnificent superiority of the Irish mind to the trammels of officialdom, and the inveterate supremacy in Ireland of the Personal Element.

"You might get a foot-warmer at Carrig Junction," said a species of lay porter in a knitted jersey, ramming my suit-case upside down under the seat. "Sometimes they're in it, and more times they're not."

The train dragged itself rheumatically from the station, and a cold spring rain—the time was the middle of a most inclement April—smote it in flank as it came into the open. I pulled up both windows and began to smoke; there is, at least, a semblance of warmth in a thoroughly vitiated atmosphere.

It is my wife's habit to assert that I do not read her letters, and being now on my way to join her and my family in Gloucestershire, it seemed a sound thing to study again her latest letter of instructions.

"I am starting to-day, as Alice wrote to say we must be there two days before the wedding, so as to have a rehearsal for the pages. Their dresses have come, and they look too delicious in them——"

(I here omit profuse particulars not pertinent to this tale)——

"It is sickening for you to have had such bad

sport. If the worst comes to the worst couldn't you buy one ?——'

I smote my hand upon my knee. I had forgotten the infernal salmon ! What a score for Philippa ! If these contretemps would only teach her that I was not to be relied upon, they would have their uses, but experience is wasted upon her ; I have no objection to being called an idiot, but, that being so, I ought to be allowed the privileges and exemptions proper to idiots. Philippa had, no doubt, written to Alice Hervey, and assured her that Sinclair would be only too delighted to bring her a salmon, and Alice Hervey, who was rich enough to find much enjoyment in saving money, would reckon upon it, to its final fin in mayonnaise.

Plunged in morose meditations, I progressed through a country parcelled out by shaky and crooked walls into a patchwood of hazel scrub and rocky fields, veiled in rain. About every six miles there was a station, wet and windswept ; at one the sole occurrence was the presentation of a newspaper to the guard by the stationmaster ; at the next the guard read aloud some choice excerpts from the same to the porter. The Personal Element was potent on this branch of the Munster and Connaught Railway. Routine, abhorrent to all artistic minds, was sheathed in conversation ; even the engine-driver, a functionary ordinarily as aloof as the Mikado, alleviated his enforced isolation by sociable

shrieks to every level crossing, while the long row of public-houses that formed, as far as I could judge, the town of Carrig, received a special and, as it seemed, humorous salutation.

The Time-Table decreed that we were to spend ten minutes at Carrig Junction; it was fifteen before the crowd of market people on the platform had been assimilated; finally, the window of a neighbouring carriage was flung open, and a wrathful English voice asked how much longer the train was going to wait. The stationmaster, who was at the moment engrossed in conversation with the guard and a man who was carrying a long parcel wrapped in newspaper, looked round, and said gravely,—

"Well now, that's a mystery!"

The man with the parcel turned away, and convulsively studied a poster. The guard put his hand over his mouth.

The voice, still more wrathfully, demanded the earliest hour at which its owner could get to Belfast.

"Ye'll be asking me next when I take me breakfast," replied the stationmaster, without haste or palpable annoyance.

The window went up again with a bang, the man with the parcel dug the guard in the ribs with his elbow, and the parcel slipped from under his arm and fell on the platform.

"Oh my! oh my! Me fish!" exclaimed the man,

solicitously picking up a remarkably good-looking salmon that had slipped from its wrapping of newspaper.

Inspiration came to me, and I, in my turn, opened my window and summoned the stationmaster.

Would his friend sell me the salmon? The stationmaster entered upon the mission with ardour, but without success.

No; the gentleman was only just after running down to the town for it in the delay, but why wouldn't I run down and get one for myself? There were half a dozen more of them below at Coffey's, selling cheap; there would be time enough, the mail wasn't signalled yet.

I jumped from the carriage and doubled out of the station at top speed, followed by an assurance from the guard that he would not forget me.

Congratulating myself on the ascendancy of the Personal Element, I sped through the soapy limestone mud towards the public-houses. *En route* I met a heated man carrying yet another salmon, who, without preamble, informed me that there were three or four more good fish in it, and that he was after running down from the train himself.

"Ye have whips o' time!" he called after me. "It's the first house that's not a public-house. Ye'll see boots in the window—she'll give them for tenpence a pound if ye're stiff with her!"

I ran past the public-houses.

"Tenpence a pound!" I exclaimed inwardly, "at this time of year! That's good enough."

Here I perceived the house with boots in the window, and dived into its dark doorway.

A cobbler was at work behind a low counter. He mumbled something about Herself, through lengths of waxed thread that hung across his mouth, a fat woman appeared at an inner door, and at that moment I heard, appallingly near, the whistle of the incoming mail. The fat woman grasped the situation in an instant, and with what appeared but one movement, snatched a large fish from the floor of the room behind her and flung a newspaper round it.

"Eight pound weight!" she said swiftly. "Ten shillings!"

A convulsive effort of mental arithmetic assured me that this was more than tenpence a pound, but it was not the moment for stiffness. I shoved a half-sovereign into her fishy hand, clasped my salmon in my arms, and ran.

Needless to say it was uphill, and at the steepest gradient another whistle stabbed me like a spur; above the station roof successive and advancing puffs of steam warned me that the worst had probably happened, but still I ran. When I gained the platform my train was already clear of it, but the Personal Element held good. Every soul in the station, or so it seemed to me, lifted up his voice and

yelled. The stationmaster put his fingers in his mouth and sent after the departing train an unearthly whistle, with a high trajectory and a serrated edge. It took effect: the train slackened, I plunged from the platform and followed it up the rails, and every window in both trains blossomed with the heads of deeply-interested spectators. The guard met me on the line, very apologetic and primed with an explanation that the gentleman going for the boat-train wouldn't let him wait any longer, while from our rear came an exultant cry from the stationmaster.

"Ye *told* him ye wouldn't forget him!"

"There's a few countrywomen in your carriage, sir," said the guard, ignoring the taunt, as he shoved me and my salmon up the side of the train, "but they'll be getting out in a couple of stations. There wasn't another seat in the train for them!"

My sensational return to my carriage was viewed with the utmost sympathy by no less than seven shawled and cloaked countrywomen. In order to make room for me, one of them seated herself on the floor with her basket in her lap, another, on the seat opposite to me, squeezed herself under the central elbow flap that had been turned up to make room. The aromas of wet cloaks, turf smoke, and salt fish formed a potent blend. I was excessively hot, and the eyes of the seven women were fastened upon me with intense and unwearying interest.

"Move west a small piece, Mary Jack, if you please," said a voluminous matron in the corner. "I declare we're as throng as three in a bed this minute!"

"Why then, Julia Casey, there's little throubling yourself," grumbled the woman under the flap. "Look at the way meself is! I wonder is it to be putting humps on themselves the gentry has them things down on top o' them! I'd sooner be carrying a basket of turnips on me back than to be scrooged this way!"

The woman on the floor at my feet rolled up at me a glance of compassionate amusement at this rustic ignorance, and tactfully changed the conversation by supposing that it was at Coffey's I got the salmon.

I said it was.

There was a silence, during which it was obvious that one question burnt in every heart.

"I'll go bail she axed him tinpence!" said the woman under the flap, as one who touches the limits of absurdity.

"It's a beautiful fish!" I said defiantly. "Eight pounds weight. I gave her ten shillings for it."

What is described in newspapers as "sensation in court" greeted this confession.

"Look!" said the woman under the flap, darting her head out of the hood of her cloak, like a tortoise, "t' is what it is, ye haven't as much

roguery in your heart as'd make ye a match for her ! "

" Divil blow the ha'penny Eliza Coffey paid for that fish ! " burst out the fat woman in the corner. " Thim lads o' hers had a creel full o' thim snatched this morning before it was making day ! "

" How would the gentleman be a match for her ! " shouted the woman on the floor through a long-drawn whistle that told of a coming station. " Sure a Turk itself wouldn't be a match for her ! That one has a tongue that'd clip a hedge ! "

At the station they clambered out laboriously, and with groaning. I handed down to them their monster baskets, laden, apparently, with ingots of lead ; they told me in return that I was a fine *grauver* man, and it was a pity there weren't more like me ; they wished, finally, that my journey might well thrive with me, and passed from my ken, bequeathing to me, after the agreeable manner of their kind, a certain comfortable mental sleekness that reason cannot immediately dispel. They also left me in possession of the fact that I was about to present the irreproachable Alice Hervey with a contraband salmon.

The afternoon passed cheerlessly into evening, and my journey did not conspicuously thrive with me. Somewhere in the dripping twilight I changed trains, and again later on, and at each change the salmon moulted some more of its damp raiment

of newspaper, and I debated seriously the idea of interring it, regardless of consequences, in my portmanteau. A lamp was banged into the roof of my carriage, half an inch of orange flame, poised in a large glass globe, like a gold-fish, and of about as much use as an illuminant. Here also was handed in the dinner basket that I had wired for, and its contents, arid though they were, enabled me to achieve at least some measure of mechanical distension, followed by a dreary lethargy that was not far from drowsiness.

At the next station we paused long; nothing whatever occurred, and the rain drummed patiently upon the roof. Two nuns and some school-girls were in the carriage next door, and their voices came plaintively and in snatches through the partition; after a long period of apparent collapse, during which I closed my eyes to evade the cold gaze of the salmon through the netting, a voice in the next carriage said resourcefully:

"Oh, girls, I'll tell you what we'll do! We'll say the Rosary!"

"Oh, that will be lovely!" said another voice; "well, who'll give it out? Theresa Condon, you'll give it out."

Theresa Condon gave it out, in a not unmelodious monotone, interspersed with the responses, always in a lower cadence; the words were indistinguishable, but the rise and fall of the western

voices was lulling as the hum of bees. I fell asleep.

I awoke in total darkness; the train was motionless, and complete and profound silence reigned. We were at a station, that much I discerned by the light of a dim lamp at the far end of a platform glistening with wet. I struck a match and ascertained that it was eleven o'clock, precisely the hour at which I was to board the mail train. I jumped out and ran down the platform; there was no one in the train; there was no one even on the engine, which was forlornly hissing to itself in the silence. There was not a human being anywhere. Every door was closed, and all was dark. The name-board of the station was faintly visible; with a lighted match I went along it letter by letter. It seemed as if the whole alphabet were in it, and by the time I had got to the end I had forgotten the beginning. One fact I had, however, mastered, that it was not the junction at which I was to catch the mail.

I was undoubtedly awake, but for a moment I was inclined to entertain the idea that there had been an accident, and that I had entered upon existence in another world. Once more I assailed the station house and the appurtenances thereof, the ticket-office, the waiting room, finally, and at some distance, the goods store, outside which the single lamp of the station commented feebly on the drizzle and the darkness. As I approached it a crack of

light under the door became perceptible, and a voice was suddenly uplifted within.

"Your best now agin that! Throw down your Jack!"

I opened the door with pardonable violence, and found the guard, the stationmaster, the driver, and the stoker, seated on barrels round a packing case, on which they were playing a game of cards.

To have too egregiously the best of a situation is not, to a generous mind, a source of strength. In the perfection of their overthrow I permitted the driver and stoker to wither from their places, and to fade away into the outer darkness without any suitable send-off; with the guard and the stationmaster I dealt more faithfully, but the pleasure of throwing water on drowned rats is not a lasting one. I accepted the statements that they thought there wasn't a Christian in the train, that a few minutes here or there wouldn't signify, that they would have me at the junction in twenty minutes, and it was often the mail was late.

Fired by this hope I hurried back to my carriage, preceded at an emulous gallop by the officials. The guard thrust in with me the lantern from the card table, and fled to his van.

"Mind the Goods, Tim!" shouted the stationmaster, as he slammed my door, "she might be coming any time now!"

The answer travelled magnificently back from the engine.

"Let her come! She'll meet her match!" A war-whoop upon the steam whistle fittingly closed the speech, and the train sprang into action.

We had about fifteen miles to go, and we banged and bucketed over it in what was, I should imagine record time. The carriage felt as if it were galloping on four wooden legs, my teeth chattered in my head, and the salmon slowly churned its way forth from its newspaper, and moved along the netting with dreadful stealth.

All was of no avail.

"Well," said the guard, as I stepped forth on to the deserted platform of Loughranny, "that owld Limited Mail's th' unpunctualest thrain in Ireland! If you're a minute late she's gone from you, and may be if you were early you might be half an hour waiting for her!"

On the whole the guard was a gentleman. He said he would show me the best hotel in the town, though he feared I would be hard set to get a bed anywhere because of the "*Feis*" (a Feis, I should explain, is a Festival, devoted to competitions in Irish songs and dances). He shouldered my portmanteau, he even grappled successfully with the salmon, and, as we traversed the empty streets, he explained to me how easily I could catch the morning boat from Rosslare, and how it was, as a matter

of fact, quite the act of Providence that my origina scheme had been frustrated.

All was dark at the uninviting portals of the hotel favoured by the guard. For a full five minutes we waited at them, ringing hard: I suggested that we should try elsewhere.

"He'll come," said the guard, with the confidence of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, retaining an implacable thumb upon the button of the electric bell. "He'll come. Sure it rings in his room!"

The victim came, half awake, half dressed, and with an inch of dripping candle in his fingers. There was not a bed there, he said, nor in the town neither.

I said I would sit in the dining-room till the time for the early train.

"Sure there's five beds in the dining-room," replied the boots, "and there's mostly two in every bed."

His voice was firm, but there was a wavering look in his eye.

"What about the billiard-room, Mike?" said the guard, in wooing tones.

"Ah, God bless you! we have a mattress on the table this minute!" answered the boots, wearily, "and the fellow that got the First Prize for Reels asleep on top of it!"

"Well, and can't ye put the palliasse on the floor under it, ye omadhawn?" said the guard,

dumping my luggage and the salmon in the hall; "sure there's no snugger place in the house! I must run away home now, before Herself thinks I'm dead altogether!"

His retreating footsteps went lightly away down the empty street.

"Annything don't throuble *him!*" said the boots bitterly.

As for me, nothing save the Personal Element stood between me and destitution.

It was in the dark of the early morning that I woke again to life and its troubles. A voice, dropping, as it were, over the edge of some smothering over-world, had awakened me. It was the voice of the First Prize for Reels, descending through a pocket of the billiard-table.

"I beg your pardon, sir, are ye going on the 5 to Cork?"

I grunted a negative.

"Well, if ye were, ye'd be late," said the voice.

I received this useful information in indignant silence, and endeavoured to wrap myself again in the vanishing skirts of a dream.

"I'm going on the 6.30 meself," proceeded the voice, "and it's unknown to me how I'll put on me boots. Me feet is swelled the size o' three-pound loaves with the dint of the little dancing-shoes I had

on me in the competition last night. Me feet's delicate that way, and I'm a great epicure about me boots."

I snored aggressively, but the dream was gone. So, for all practical purposes, was the night.

The First Prize for Reels arose, presenting an astonishing spectacle of grass-green breeches, a white shirt, and pearl-grey stockings, and accomplished a toilet that consisted of removing these and putting on ordinary garments, completed by the apparently excruciating act of getting into his boots. At any other hour of the day I might have been sorry for him. He then removed himself and his belongings to the hall, and there entered upon a resounding conversation with the boots, while I crawled forth from my lair to renew the strife with circumstances and to endeavour to compose a telegram to Alice Hervey of explanation and apology that should cost less than seven and sixpence. There was also the salmon to be dealt with.

Here the boots intervened, opportunely, with a cup of tea, and the intelligence that he had already done up the salmon in straw bottle-covers and brown paper, and that I could travel Europe with it if I liked. He further informed me that he would run up to the station with the luggage now, and that maybe I wouldn't mind carrying the fish myself; it was on the table in the hall.

My train went at 6.15. The boots had secured for

me one of many empty carriages, and lingered conversationally till the train started; he regretted politely my bad night at the hotel, and assured me that only for Jimmy Durkan having a little drink taken—Jimmy Durkan was the First Prize for Reels—he would have turned him off the billiard-table for my benefit. He finally confided to me that Mr. Durkan was engaged to his sister, and was a rising baker in the town of Limerick, "indeed," he said, "any girl might be glad to get him. He dances like whalebone, and he makes grand bread!"

Here the train started.

It was late that night when, stiff, dirty, with tired eyes blinking in the dazzle of electric lights, I was conducted by the Herveys' beautiful footman into the Herveys' baronial hall, and was told by the Herveys' imperial butler that dinner was over, and the gentlemen had just gone into the drawing-room. I was in the act of hastily declining to join them there, when a voice cried—

"Here he is!"

And Philippa, rustling and radiant, came forth into the hall, followed in shimmers of satin, and flutterings of lace, by Alice Hervey, by the bride-elect, and by the usual festive rout of exhilarated relatives, male and female, whose mission it is to keep things lively before a wedding.

"Is this a wedding present for me, Uncle Sin-

clair ? " cried the bride-elect, through a deluge of questions and commiserations, and snatched from under my arm the brown paper parcel that had remained there from force of direful habit.

" I advise you not to open it ! " I exclaimed ; " it's a salmon ! "

The bride-elect, with a shriek of disgust, and without an instant of hesitation, hurled it at her nearest neighbour, the head bridesmaid. The head bridesmaid, with an answering shriek, sprang to one side, and the parcel that I had cherished with a mother's care across two countries and a stormy channel, fell, with a crash, on the flagged floor.

Why did it crash?

" A salmon ! " screamed Philippa, gazing at the parcel, round which a pool was already forming, " why, that's whisky ! Can't you smell it ? "

The footman here respectfully interposed, and kneeling down, cautiously extracted from folds of brown paper a straw bottle-cover full of broken glass and dripping with whisky.

" I'm afraid the other things are rather spoiled, sir," he said seriously, and drew forth, successively, a very large pair of high-low shoes, two long grey worsted stockings, and a pair of grass-green breeches.

They brought the house down, in a manner doubtless familiar to them when they shared the triumphs

of Mr. Jimmy Durkan, but they left Alice Hervey distinctly cold.

"You know, darling," she said to Philippa afterwards, "I don't think it was very clever of dear Sinclair to take the wrong parcel. I *had* counted on that salmon."

IV

"THE MAN THAT CAME TO BUY APPLES"

It had been freezing hard all the way home, and the Quaker skated perilously once or twice on the northerly stretches. As I passed the forge near my gate I issued an order for frost-nails, and while I did so the stars were kindling like diamonds over the black ridge of Shreelane Hill.

The overture to the Frost Symphony had begun, with its usual beauties and difficulties, and its leading theme was given forth in a missive from Flurry Knox, that awaited me on the hall table. Flurry's handwriting was an unattractive blend of the laundress's bill and the rambling zigzags of the temperature chart, but he exhibited no more of it than was strictly necessary in getting to the point. Would I shoot at Aussolas the following day? There were a lot of cock in, and he had whipped up four guns in a hurry. There was a postscript, "Bernard Shute is coming. Tell Mrs. Yeates he didn't kill any one yet this season."

Since his marriage Flurry had been promoted to the position of agent to his grandmother, old Mrs.

Knox of Aussolas, and through the unfathomable mazes of their dealings and fights with each other, the fact remained that he had secured to himself the Aussolas shooting at about half its market value. So Mrs. Knox said. Her grandson, on the other hand, had often informed me that the privilege "had him beggared, what with beaters and all sorts, and his grandmother's cattle turned into the woods destroying all the covert—let alone her poaching." Into the differences of such skilled combatants the prudent did not intrude themselves, but they accepted without loss of time such invitations to shoot at Aussolas as came their way. Notwithstanding the buccaneerings of Flurry's grandmother, the woods of Aussolas, in decent weather, were usually good for fifteen to twenty couple of cock.

I sent my acceptance before mentioning to Philippa that Bernard Shute was to be of the party. It was impossible to make Philippa understand that those who shot Bernard's pheasants at Clountiss, could hardly do less than retaliate when occasion served. I had once, in a moment of regrettable expansion, entertained my wife with an account of how an entire shooting party had successively cast themselves upon their faces, while the muzzle of Bernard's gun had followed, half way round the compass, a rabbit that had broken back. No damage had ensued, not even to the rabbit, but I had supplied Philippa with a fact that was an unfortunate com-

bination of a thorn in her pillow and a stone in her sling.

The frost held; it did more than hold, it gripped. As I drove to Aussolas the fields lay rigid in the constraining cold; the trees were as dead as the telegraph poles, and the whistle of the train came thin and ghostly across four miles of silent country. Everything was half alive, with the single exception of the pony, which, filled with the idiotic exaltation that frost imparts to its race, danced upon its frost-nails, shied with untiring inventiveness, and made three several and well-conceived attempts to bolt. Maria, with her nose upon my gaiter, shuddered uninterruptedly throughout the drive, partly because of the pinching air, partly in honour of the sovereign presence of the gun-case.

Old Mrs. Knox was standing on the steps as I walked round to the hall door of Aussolas Castle. She held a silver bowl in her hand; on her head, presumably as a protection against the cold, was a table-napkin; round her feet a throng of hens and pigeons squabbled for the bits that she flung to them from the bowl, and a furtive and distrustful peacock darted a blue neck in among them from the outskirts.

"'Good-morrow, old Sir Thomas Erpingham,'" was Mrs. Knox's singular greeting, "'a good soft pillow for that good grey head were better than a churlish turf of France'!"

My friendship with Mrs. Knox was now of several years' standing, and I knew enough of her to gather that I stood rebuked for being late.

"Flurry arrived only half an hour ago! my first intimation of a shooting party," she continued, in the dictatorial voice that was always a shock when taken in connection with her beggar woman's costume, "a nice time of day to begin to look for beaters! And the other feather-bed sportsmen haven't arrived yet. In old times they would have had ten couple by this time, and then Mr. Flurry complains of the shooting!"

She was here interrupted by the twitching of the table-napkin from her head by her body-woman, who had advanced upon her from the rear, with the reigning member of the dynasty of purple velvet bonnets in her hand. The bonnet was substituted for the table-napkin, much as a stage property is shoved on from the wings, and two bony hands, advancing from behind, tied the strings under Mrs. Knox's chin, while she uninterruptedly fed the hens, and denounced the effeteness of modern cock-shooters. The hands descended and fixed a large pin in the uppermost of her mistress's shawls.

"Mullins, have done!" exclaimed Mrs. Knox, suddenly tearing herself from her captor, "you're an intolerable nuisance!"

"Oh, very well, ma'am, maybe you'd sooner go out with your head naked and soak the cold!"

returned Mullins, retiring with the honours of war and the table-napkin.

"Mullins and I get on famously," observed Mrs. Knox, crushing an empty egg-shell with her yellow diamonded fingers and returning it to its original donors, "we're both mad, you know!"

Comment on this might have been difficult, but I was preserved from it by the approach across the frozen gravel of a short, red-bearded man, Mrs. Knox's gardener, wood-ranger, and ruling counsellor, John Kane. He held in his hands two large apples of arsenical hue, and, taking off his hat to me with much dignity, addressed himself to the lady of the house.

"He says he'd sooner walk barefoot to Cork than to give three and fippence for the likes of them!"

"I'm sure I've no objection if he does," responded Mrs. Knox, turning the silver bowl upside down over the scrimmaging hens and pigeons, "I daresay it would be no novelty to him."

"And isn't that what I told him!" said John Kane, his voice at once ascending to the concert pitch of altercation, "I said to him if the Lord Left'nant and the Pope was follying me around the yard of Aussolas offering three and a penny for them apples they'd not get them! Sure the nuns gave us that much for windfalls that was only fit to be making cherubs with!"

I might have been struck by the fitness, as well as the ingenuity, of this industry, but in some remote

byway of my brain the remembrance woke of a "black-currant cherub" prescribed by Mrs. Cadogan for sore throats, and divined by Philippa to be a syrup. I turned away and lit a cigarette in order to conceal my feelings from John Kane, round whose red beard the smoke of battle hung almost palpably.

"What's between you?" asked his mistress sharply.

"Three and a penny he's offering, ma'am!" declaimed her deputy, "for sheeps' noses that there isn't one in the country has but yourself! And not a brown farthing more would he give!—the consecrated blagyard!"

Anything less like a sheep's nose than Mrs. Knox's hooked beak, as she received this information, could hardly be imagined.

"You're half a fool, John Kane!" she snapped, "and the other half's not sensible! Go back and tell him Major Yeates is here and wants to buy every apple I have!" She dealt me a wink that was the next thing to a dig in the ribs. As she spoke a cart drawn by a cheerful-looking grey pony, and conducted by a tall, thin man, came into view from the direction of the yard. It rattled emptily, and proclaimed, as was intended, the rupture of all business relations.

"See here, sir," said John Kane to me in one hoarse breath, "when he's over-right the door I'll ask him the three and fippence again, and when he

refuses, your Honour will say we should split the difference——"

The cart advanced, it passed the hall door with a dignity but little impaired by the pony's apprehensive interest in the peacock, and the tall man took off his hat to Mrs. Knox with as gloomy a respect as if she had been a funeral.

John Kane permitted to the salutation the full time due to it, in the manner of one who counts a semibreve rest, while the cart moved implacably onwards. The exact, the psychic instant arrived.

"HONOMAUNDHIAOUL! SULLIVAN!" he shouted, with a full-blown burst of ferocity, hurtling down the steps in pursuit, "will ye take them or lave them?"

To manifest, no doubt, her complete indifference to the issue, Mrs. Knox turned and went into the house, followed by the majority of the hens, and left me to await my cue. The play was played out with infinite credit to both artists, and at the full stretch of their lungs; at the preordained moment I intervened with the conventional impromptu, and suggested that the difference should be split. The curtain immediately fell, and somewhere in the deep of the hall a glimpse of the purple bonnet told me that Mrs. Knox was in the auditorium.

When I rejoined her I found Flurry with her, and something in the atmosphere told that here also was storm.

" Well, take them ! Take them all ! " Mrs. Knox was saying in high indignation. " Take Mullins and the maids if you like ! I daresay they might be more use than the men ! "

" They'll make more row, anyhow," said Flurry sourly. " I wonder is it them that put down all the rabbit-traps I'm after seeing in the coach-house this minute ! "

" It may be *they*, but it certainly is not *them*," retorted Mrs. Knox, hitting flagrantly below the belt ; " and if you want beaters found for you, you should give me more than five minutes' warning——" She turned with the last word, and moved towards the staircase.

" I beg your pardon, ma'am," said John Kane, very respectfully, from the hall door, " that Sullivan brought this down for your Honour."

He placed on the table a bottle imperfectly wrapped in newspaper.

" Tell Sullivan," said Flurry, without an instant's hesitation, " that he makes the worst potheen in the country, and I'll prosecute him for bringing it here, unless he comes out to beat with the rest of you."

Remembering my official position, I discreetly examined the barrels of my gun.

" You'll give him no such message ! " screamed Mrs. Knox over the dark rail of the staircase. " Let him take himself and his apples off out of

this!" Then, in the same breath, and almost the same key, "Major Yeates, which do you prefer, curry, or Irish stew?"

The *cuisine* at Aussolas was always fraught with dark possibilities, being alternately presided over by bibulous veterans from Dublin, or aboriginal kitchenmaids off the estate. Feeling as Fair Rosamond might have felt when proffered the dagger or the bowl, I selected curry.

"Then curry it shall be," said Mrs. Knox, with a sudden and awful affability. In this gleam of stormy sunshine I thought it well to withdraw.

"Did you ever eat my grandmother's curry?" said Flurry to me, later, as we watched Bernard Shute trying to back his motor into the coachhouse.

I said I thought not.

"Well, you'd take a splint off a horse with it," said Mrs. Knox's grandson.

The Aussolas woods were full of birds that day. Birds bursting out of holly bushes like corks out of soda-water bottles, skimming low under the branches of fir trees, bolting across rides at a thousand miles an hour, swinging away through prohibitive tree tops, but to me had befallen the inscrutable and invincible accident of being "off my day," and, by an equal unkindness, Fate had allotted to me the station next Flurry. Every kind of bird came my way except the easy ones, and, as a general thing, when I had done no more than add a little pace to

their flight, they went down to Flurry, who never in my experience had been off his day, and they seldom went farther afield. The beaters, sportsmen every man of them, had a royal time. They flailed the bushes and whacked the tree trunks; the discordant chorus of "Hi cock! Hi cock! Cock! Cock! Prrrr!" rioted through the peaceful woods, and every other minute a yell of "Mark!" broke like a squib through the din. The clamour, the banging of the guns, and the expectancy, kept the nerves tingling; the sky between the grey branches was as blue as Italy's; despite fingers as icy as the gun-barrels, despite the speechless reproach of Maria, slinking at my heels in unemployed dejection, I enjoyed every breath of the frosty day. After all, hit or miss, a good day with the cock comes very near a good day with the hounds, without taking into consideration the comfortable fact that in the former the risk is all on the side of the birds.

Little Bosanquet, the captain of coastguards, on my left, was doing remarkably well, so apparently was Murray, the D.I. of Police; how Bernard Shute was faring I knew not, but he was certainly burning a lot of powder. At the end of the third beat I found myself beside Murray. His face was redder than usual, even his freckles conveyed an impression of impartially sprinkled cayenne pepper.

"Did you see Shute just now?" he demanded in a ferocious whisper. "A bird got up between us,

and he blazed straight at me! Straight bang in my face, I tell you! Only that I was in a dead line with the bird he'd have got me!"

"I suppose that was about the safest place," I said. "What did you do?"

"I simply told him that if ever he puts a grain into me I shall let him have it back, both barrels."

"Every one says that to Bernard sooner or later," said I pacifically; "he'll settle down after lunch."

"We'll all settle down into our graves," grumbled Murray; "that'll be the end of it."

After this it was scarcely composing to a husband and father to find Mr. Shute occupying the position on my right hand as we embarked upon the last beat of the Middle Wood. He was still distinctly unsettled, and most distressingly on the alert. Nothing escaped his vigilance, the impossible wood pigeon, clattering out of the wrong side of a fir tree, received its brace of cartridges as instantly as the palpable rabbit, fleeing down the ride before him, and with an equal immunity. Between my desire to keep the thickest tree trunks between me and him, and the companion desire that he should be thoroughly aware of my whereabouts, my shooting, during that beat, went still more to pieces; a puff of feathers, wandering softly down through the radiant air, was the sum total of my achievements.

The end of the beat brought us to the end of the wood, and out upon an open space of sedgy grass and bog that stretched away on the right to the shore of Aussolas Lake ; opposite to us, a couple of hundred yards away, was another and smaller wood, clothing one side of a high promontory near the head of the lake. Flurry and I were first out of the covert.

" We'll have time to run through the Rhododendron Wood before lunch," he said, looking at his watch. " Here ! John Kane ! " He put two fingers in his mouth and projected a whistle that cleft my head like a scimitar.

John Kane emerged, nymph-like, from a laurel bush in our immediate vicinity.

" 'Tis only lost time to be beating them rosy-dandhrums, Master Flurry," he said volubly, " there wasn't a bird in that bit o' wood this winter. Not a week passes but I'm in it, making up the bounds fence against the cattle, and I never seen a one ! "

" You might be more apt to be looking out for a rabbit than a cock, John," said Flurry expressionlessly, " but isn't it down in the lower paddocks you have the cattle and the young horses this hard weather ? "

" Oh it is, sir, it is, of course, but indeed it's hard for me to know where they are, with the Misthress telling this one and that one to put them in their choice place. Sure she dhrives me to and fro in my mind till I do have a headache from her ! "

A dull rumble came to us across the marsh, and, as if Mrs. Knox had been summoned by her henchman's accusation, there laboured into view on the road that skirted the marsh a long and dilapidated equipage, silhouetted, with its solitary occupant, against the dull shine of the frozen lake.

"Tally-ho! Here comes the curry for you, Major! You'll have to eat it, I tell you!" He paused. "I'm dashed if she hasn't got Sullivan's pony! Well, she'd steal the horns off a cow!"

It was indeed the grey pony that paced demurely in the shafts of Mrs. Knox's phaeton, and at its head marched Sullivan; fragments of loud and apparently agreeable conversation reached us, as the procession moved onwards to the usual luncheon tryst at the head of the lake.

"Come now, John Kane," said Flurry, eyeing the cortège, "you're half your day sitting in front of the kitchen fire. How many of my rabbits went into that curry?"

"Rabbits, Master Flurry?" echoed John Kane, almost pityingly, "there's no call for them trash in Aussolas kitchen! And if we wanted them itself we'd not get them. I declare to me conscience there's not a rabbit in Aussolas demesne this minute, with the way your Honour has them ferreted—let alone the foxes!——"

"I suppose it's scarcely worth your while to put the traps down," said Flurry benignly;

"that's why they were in the coach-house this morning."

There was an undissembled titter from a group of beaters in the background; Flurry tucked his gun under his arm and walked on.

"It'd be no more than a charity if ye'd eat the lunch now, sir," urged John Kane at his elbow, in fluent remonstrance, "and leave Sullivan go home. Sure it'll be black night on him before the Misthress will be done with him. And as for that wood, it's hardly we can go through it with the threes that's down since the night of the Big Wind, and briars, and all sorts. Sure the last time I was through it me pants was in shreds, and I was that tired when I got home I couldn't stoop to pick a herrin' off a tongs, and as for the floods and the holes in the western end—" John Kane drew a full breath, and with a trawling glance gathered Bernard and me into his audience. "I declare to ye, gintlemen, me boots when I took them off was more than boots! They resimbled the mouth of a hake!"

"Ah, shut your own mouth," said Flurry.

The big rhododendron was one of the glories of Aussolas. Its original progenitor had been planted by Flurry's great-grandmother, and now, after a century of unchecked license, it and its descendants ran riot among the pine stems on the hill-side above the lake, and, in June, clothed a precipitous half

acre with infinite varieties of pale mysterious mauve. The farm road by which Mrs. Knox had traversed the marsh, here followed obediently the spurs of the wood and creeks of the shore, in their alternate give and take. From the exalted station that had been given me on the brow of the hill, I looked down on it between the trunks of the pine trees, and saw, instead of mysterious mauve blossoms, the defiant purple of Mrs. Knox's bonnet, glowing, motionless, in a sheltered and sunny angle of the road just where it met the wood. She was drawn up in her phaeton with her back to a tumble-down erection of stones and branches, that was supposed to bar the way into the wood, beside her was the great flat boulder that had for generations been the table for shooting lunches. How, in any area of less than a quarter of a mile, Sullivan had contrived to turn the phaeton, was known only to himself, but he had accomplished it, and was now adding to the varied and unforeseen occupations of his day the task of unpacking the luncheon basket. As I waited for the whistle that was the signal for the beat to begin, I viewed the proceedings up to the point where Sullivan, now warming artistically to his work, crowned the arrangement with the bottle of potheen.

It was at that moment that I espied John Kane break from a rhododendron bush beside the phaeton, with a sack over his shoulder. This, as far as I

could see through the branches, he placed upon Mrs. Knox's lap, the invaluable Sullivan hurrying to his aid. The next instant I saw Murray arrive and take up his allotted station upon the road; John Kane retired into the evergreen thicket as abruptly as he had emerged from it, Flurry's whistle sounded, and the yells of "Hi cock" began again.

We moved forward very slowly, in order to keep station with Murray, who had to follow on the road the outer curve of the wood, while we struck straight across it. It was a wood of old and starveling trees, strangled by ivy, broken by combat with each other in the storms that rushed upon them up the lake; it was two years since I had last been through it, and I remembered well the jungle of ferns and the undergrowth of briars that had shredded the pants of John Kane, and had held in their thorny depths what Flurry had described as a "dose of cock." To-day the wood seemed strangely bare, and remarkably out of keeping with John Kane's impassioned indictment; the ferns, even the bracken, had almost disappeared, the briar brakes were broken down, and laced with black paths, and in the frozen paste of dead leaves and peat mould the hoof-marks of cattle and horses bore witness against them, like the thumb-prints of a criminal. In the first ten minutes not a gun had been let off; I anticipated pleasantly, if inadequately, the remarks that Flurry would address to John Kane at the conclusion of

the beat. To foreshadow John Kane's reply to Flurry was a matter less simple. Bernard Shute was again the next gun on my left, and kept, as was his wont, something ahead of his due place in the line; of this I did not complain, it made it all the easier to keep my eye on him. The idle cartridges in his gun were obviously intolerable to him; as he crossed a little glade he discharged both barrels into the firmament, where far above, in tense flight and steady as a constellation, moved a wedge of wild geese. The wedge continued its course unshaken, but, as if lifted by the bang, the first woodcock of the beat got up in front of me, and swung away into the rhododendrons. "Mark!" I shouted, loosing an ineffectual cartridge after him. Mr. Shute was equal to the occasion, and let fly his usual postman's knock with both barrels. In instant response there arose from behind the rhododendrons the bray of a donkey, fraught with outrage and terror, followed by crashing of branches and the thunderous galloping of many hoofs, and I had a glimpse of a flying party of cattle and horses, bursting from the rhododendron bushes and charging down a grassy slope in the direction of the road. Every tail was in the air, the cattle bellowed, and the donkey, heading the flight, did not cease to proclaim his injuries.

"How many of them have you hit?" I shouted.

"I believe I got 'em all, bar the cock!" returned

Mr. Shute, with ecstasy scarcely tempered by horror.

I hastened to the brow of the hill, and thence beheld Mrs. Knox's live stock precipitate themselves on to the road, and turn as one man in the direction of home. With a promptitude for which I have never been given sufficient credit, I shoved my gun into the branches of a tree and ran back through the wood at my best pace. In that glimpse of the rout I had recognised the streaming chestnut mane and white legs of the venerable Trinket, the most indomitable old rogue that had ever reared up generations of foals in the way they should not go, and I knew by repute that once she was set going it would take more to stop her than the half-demolished barricade at the entrance to the wood.

As I ran I seemed to see Trinket and her disciples hurling themselves upon Mrs. Knox's phaeton and Sullivan's pony, with what results no man could tell. They had, however, first to circumnavigate the promontory; my chance was by crossing it at the neck to get to the phaeton before them. The going was bad, and the time was short; I went for all I was worth, and Maria, mystified, but burning with zeal, preceded me with kangaroo leaps and loud and hysterical barks. A mossy wall ringed the verge of the hill; I followed Maria over it, and the wall, or a good part of it, followed me down the hill. I plunged onward amid the coiling stems and branches

of the big rhododendrons, an illuminative flash of the purple bonnet giving me my bearings. A sort of track revealed itself, doubling and dodging and dropping down rocky slides, as if in flight before me. It was near the foot of the hill that a dead branch extended a claw, and with human malignity plucked the eye-glass from my eye and snapped the cord: the eye-glass, entering into the spirit of the thing, aimed for the nearest stone and hit it. It is the commonest of disasters for the short-sighted, yet custom cannot stale it; I made the usual comment, with the usual fervour and futility, and continued to blunder forward in all the discomfort of half-sight. The trumpeting of the donkey heralded the oncoming of the stampede; I broke my way through the last of the rhododendrons and tumbled out on to the road twenty yards ahead of the phaeton.

Sullivan's pony was on its hind legs, and Sullivan was hanging on to its head. Mrs. Knox was sitting erect in the phaeton with the reins in her hand.

"Get out, ma'am! Get out!" Sullivan was howling, as I scrambled to my feet.

"'Don't be a fool!" replied Mrs. Knox, without moving.

The stampede was by this time confronted by the barrier. There was not, however, a moment of hesitation; Trinket came rocketing out over

it as if her years were four, instead of four-and-twenty; she landed with her white nose nearly in the back seat of the phaeton, got past with a swerve and a slip up, and went away for her stable with her tail over her back, followed with stag-like agility by her last foal, her last foal but one, and the donkey, with the young cattle hard on their flying heels. Bernard, it was very evident, had peppered them impartially all round. Sullivan's pony was alternately ramping heraldically, and wriggling like an eel in the clutches of Sullivan, and I found myself snatching blindly at whatever came to my hand of his headstall. What I caught was a mingled handful of forelock and browband; the pony twitched back his head with the cunning that is innate in ponies, and the headstall, which was a good two sizes too large, slid over its ears as though they had been buttered, and remained, bit and all, in my hand. There was a moment of struggle, in which Sullivan made a creditable effort to get the pony's head into chancery under his arm; foreseeing the issue, I made for the old lady, with the intention of dragging her from the carriage. She was at the side farthest from me, and I got one foot into the phaeton and grasped at her.

At that precise moment the pony broke away, with a jerk that pitched me on to my knees on the mat at her feet. Simultaneously I was aware of

Sullivan, at the opposite side, catching Mrs. Knox to his bosom as the phaeton whirled past him, while I, as sole occupant, wallowed prone upon a heap of rugs. That ancient vehicle banged in and out of the ruts with an agility that ill befitted its years, while, with extreme caution and the aid of the side rail, I gained the seat vacated by Mrs. Knox, and holding on there as best I could, was aware that I was being seriously run away with by the apple-man's pony, on whom my own disastrous hand had bestowed his freedom.

The flying gang in front, enlivened no doubt by the noise in their rear, maintained a stimulating lead. We were now clear of the wood, and the frozen ditches of the causeway awaited me on either side in steely parallel lines; out in the open the frost had turned the ruts to iron, and it was here that the phaeton, entering into the spirit of the thing, began to throw out ballast. The cushions of the front seat were the first to go, followed, with a bomb-like crash, by a stone hot-water jar that had lurked in the deeps of the rugs. It was in negotiating a stiffish outcrop of rock in the track that the back seat broke loose and fell to earth with a hollow thump; with a corresponding thump I returned to my seat from a considerable altitude, and found that in the interval the cushion had removed itself from beneath me, and followed its fellows overboard. Near the

end of the causeway we were into Trinket's rear-guard, one of whom, a bouncing young heifer, slammed a kick into the pony's ribs as he drew level with her, partly as a witticism, partly as a token of contempt. With that the end came. The pony wrenched to the left, the off front wheel jammed in a rut, came off, and the phaeton rose like a live thing beneath me and bucked me out on to the road.

A succession of crashes told that the pony was making short work of the dash-board; for my part, I lay something stunned, and with a twisted ankle, on the crisp whitened grass of the causeway, and wondered dully why I was surrounded by dead rabbits.

By the time I had pulled myself together Sullivan's pony was continuing his career, accompanied by a fair proportion of the phaeton, and on the road lay an inexplicable sack, with a rabbit, like Benjamin's cup, in its mouth.

Not less inexplicable was the appearance of Minx, my wife's fox-terrier, whom I had last seen in an arm-chair by the drawing-room fire at Shreelane, and now, in the rôle of the faithful St. Bernard, was licking my face lavishly and disgustingly. Her attentions had the traditional reviving effect. I sat up and dashed her from me, and in so doing beheld my wife in the act of taking refuge in the frozen ditch, as the cavalcade swept past,

the phaeton and pony bringing up the rear like artillery.

"What has happened? Are you hurt?" she panted, speeding to me.

"I am; very much hurt," I said, with what was, I think, justifiable ill-temper, as I got gingerly on to my feet, almost annoyed to find that my leg was not broken.

"But, dearest Sinclair, *has* he shot you? I got so frightened about you that I bicycled over to— Ugh! Good gracious!"—as she trod on and into a mound of rabbits—"what are you doing with all these horrible things?"

I looked back in the direction from which I had come, and saw Mrs. Knox advancing along the causeway arm-in-arm with the now inevitable Sullivan (who, it may not be out of place to remind the reader, had come to Aussolas early in the morning, with the pure and single intention of buying apples). In Mrs. Knox's disengaged arm was something that I discerned to be the bottle of potheen, and I instantly resolved to minimise the extent of my injuries. Flurry, and various items of the shooting party, were converging upon us from the wood by as many and various short cuts. "I don't quite know what I am doing with the rabbits," I replied, "but I rather think I'm giving them away."

As I spoke something darted past Mrs. Knox,

something that looked like a bundle of rags in a cyclone, but was, as a matter of fact, my faithful water-spaniel, Maria. She came on in zig-zag bounds, in short maniac rushes. Twice she flung herself by the roadside and rolled, driving her snout into the ground like the coulter of a plough. Her eyes were starting from her head, her tail was tucked between her legs. She bit, and tore frantically with her claws at the solid ice of a puddle.

"She's mad! She's gone mad!" exclaimed Philippa, snatching up as a weapon something that looked like a frying-pan, but was, I believe, the step of the phaeton.

Maria was by this time near enough for me to discern a canary-coloured substance masking her muzzle.

"Yes, she's quite mad," I replied, possessed by a spirit of divination. "She's been eating the rabbit curry."

V

A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

It has not often been my lot to be associated with a being of so profound and rooted a pessimism as Michael Leary, Huntsman and Kennelman to Mr. Flurry Knox's Fox-hounds. His attitude was that of the one and only righteous man in a perfidious and dissolute world. With, perhaps, the exception of Flurry Knox, he believed in no one save himself. I was thoroughly aware of my inadequacy as Deputy-Master, and cherished only a hope that Michael might look upon me as a kind of Parsifal, a fool perhaps, yet at least a "blameless fool"; but during my time of office there were many distressing moments in which I was made to feel not only incapable but culpable.

Michael was small, sandy, green-eyed, freckled, and, I believe, considerably junior to myself; he neither drank nor smoked, and he had a blistering tongue. I have never tried more sincerely to earn any one's good opinion.

It was a pleasant afternoon towards the middle

of December, and I was paying my customary Sunday visit to the kennels to see the hounds fed. What Michael called "the Throch" was nearly empty; the greedier of the hounds were flitting from place to place in the line, in the undying belief that others were better off than they. I was studying the row of parti-coloured backs, and trying for the fiftieth time to fit each with its name, when I was aware of a most respectable face, with grey whiskers, regarding me from between the bars of the kennel door.

With an effort not inferior to that with which I had just discriminated between Guardsman and General, I recognised my visitor as Mr. Jeremiah Flynn, a farmer, and a cattle dealer on a large scale, with whom I had occasionally done business in a humble way. He was a District Councillor, and a man of substance; he lived twenty miles away, at a place on the coast called Knockeenbwee, in a flat-faced, two-storeyed house of the usual type of hideousness. Once, when an unkind fate had sent me to that region, I had heard the incongruous tinkle of a piano proceeding from Mr. Flynn's mansion, as I drove past fighting an umbrella against the wet wind that swept in from the Atlantic.

"I beg your pardon, Major Yeates," began Mr. Flynn, with an agreeable smile, which I saw in sections between the bars; "I had a little business over this side of the country, and I took the liberty

of taking a stroll around to the kennels to see the hounds."

I made haste to extend the hospitality of the feeding-yard to my visitor, who accepted it with equal alacrity, and went on to remark that it was wonderful weather for the time of year. Having obeyed this primary instinct of mankind, Mr. Flynn embarked upon large yet able compliments on the appearance of the hounds. His manners were excellent; sufficiently robust to accord with his grey frieze coat and flat-topped felt hat, and with just the extra touch of deference that expressed his respect for my high qualities and position.

"Ye have them in great form, Michael," he remarked, surveying the hounds' bloated sides with a knowledgeable eye; "and upon me word, there's our own poor Playboy! and a fine dog he is too!"

"He is; and a fine dog to hunt rabbits!" said Michael, without a relaxation of his drab countenance.

"I daresay, Major, you didn't know that it was in my place that fellow was rared?" continued Mr. Flynn.

Owing to his providentially distinctive colouring of lemon and white, Playboy was one of the hounds about whose identity I was never in doubt. I was able to bestow a suitable glance upon him, and to recall the fact of his having come from a trencher-fed pack, of which Mr. Flynn was the

ruling spirit, kept by the farmers in the wildernesses beyond and around Knockeenbwee.

"Ah! Mr. Knox was too smart for us over that hound!" pursued Mr. Flynn pleasantly; "there was a small difference between himself and meself in a matter of a few heifers I was buying off him —a thrifle of fifteen shillings it was, I believe——"

"Five and thirty," said Michael to the lash of his thong, in which he was making a knot.

"And I had to give him the pup before we could come to terms," ended my visitor.

Whether at fifteen or thirty-five shillings Playboy had been a cheap hound. Brief, and chiefly ornamental, as my term of office had been, I had learnt to know his voice in covert, and had learned also to act upon it in moments of solitary and helpless ignorance as to what was happening. This, however, was not the moment to sing his praises; I preserved a careful silence.

"I rared himself and his sister," said Mr. Flynn, patting Playboy heavily, "but the sister died on me. I think 'twas from all she fretted after the brother when he went, and 'twas a pity. Those two had the old Irish breed in them; sure you'd know it by the colour, and there's no more of them now in the country, only the mother, and she had a right to be shot this long time."

"Come, hounds," said Michael, interrupting this rhapsody, "open the door, Bat."

The pack swept out of the feeding-yard and were away on their wonted constitutional in half a minute.

"Grand training, grand training!" said Mr. Flynn admiringly, "they're a credit to you, Major! It's impossible to have hounds anyway disciplined running wild through the country the way our little pack is. Indeed it came into my mind on the way here to try could I coax you to come over and give us a day's hunting. We're destroyed with foxes. Such marauding I never saw! As for turkeys and fowl, they're tired of them, and it's my lambs they'll be after next!"

The moment of large and general acquiescence in Mr. Flynn's proposal narrowed itself by imperceptible degrees to the moment, not properly realised till it arrived, the horrid moment of getting up at a quarter to seven on a December morning, in order to catch the early train for Knockeenbwee.

In the belief that I was acting in the interest of sport I had announced at the last meet that there was to be a by-day at Knockeenbwee. To say that the fact was received without enthusiasm is to put it mildly. I was assured by one authority that I should have to hunt the hounds from a steam launch; another, more sympathetic, promised a drag, but tempered the encouragement by saying that the walls there were all made of slates,

and that by the end of the run the skin would be hanging off the horses' legs like the skins of bananas. Nothing short of a heart-to-heart appeal to my Whip, Dr. Jerome Hickey, induced him to promise his support. Michael, from first to last, remained an impenetrable thunder-cloud. The die, however, was cast, and the hospitality of Mr. Flynn accepted. The eve of the by-day arrived, and the Thunder-cloud and the hounds were sent on by road to Knockeenbwee, accompanied by my ancient ally Slipper, who led my mare, and rode Philippa's pony, which had been commandeered for the occasion.

Next morning at 9.45 A.M. the train stopped by signal at the flag-station of Moyny, a cheerless strip of platform, from which a dead straight road retreated to infinity across a bog. An outside car was being backed hard into the wall of the road by a long, scared rag of a chestnut horse as Dr. Hickey and I emerged from the station, and its driver was composing its anxieties as to the nature of trains by beating it in the face with his whip. This, we were informed, was Mr. Flynn's equipage, and, at a favourable moment in the conflict, Dr. Hickey and I mounted it.

"It's seldom the thrain stands here," said the driver apologetically, as we started at a strong canter, "and this one's very frightful always."

The bog ditches fleeted by at some twelve miles an hour; they were the softest, blackest, and deepest

that I have ever seen, and I thanked heaven that I was not in my red coat.

"I suppose you never met the Miss Flynns?" murmured Dr. Hickey to me across the well of the car.

I replied in the negative.

"Oh, they're very grand," went on my companion, with a wary eye on the humped back of the driver, "I believe they never put their foot outside the door unless they're going to Paris. Their father told me last week that lords in the streets of Cork were asking who they were."

"I suppose that was on their way to Paris," I suggested.

"It was not," said the driver, with stunning unexpectedness, "'twas when they went up on th'excursion last month for to have their teeth pulled. G'wout o' that!" This to the horse, who had shied heavily at a goat.

Dr. Hickey and I sank into a stricken silence, five minutes of which, at the pace we were travelling, sufficed to bring us to a little plantation, shorn and bent by the Atlantic wind, low whitewashed walls, an economical sweep of gravel, and an entrance gate constructed to fit an outside car to an inch. From the moment that these came within the range of vision the driver beat the horse with the handle of his whip, a prelude, as we discovered, to the fact that a minor gate, obviously and invitingly

leading to the yard, lolled open on one hinge at the outset of the plantation. There was a brief dissension, followed by a hand gallop to the more fitting entrance; that we should find it too fitting was a foregone conclusion, and Dr. Hickey whirled his legs on to the seat at the moment when impact between his side of the car and the gatepost became inevitable. The bang that followed was a hearty one, and the driver transmitted it to me in great perfection with his elbow as he lurched on to me; there was a second and hollower bang as the well of the car, detached by the shock, dropped on the axle and turned over, flinging from it in its somersault a harlequinade assortment of herrings, loaves of bread, and a bandbox. It was, I think, a loaf of bread that hit the horse on the hocks, but under all the circumstances even a herring would have been ample excuse for the two sledge-hammer kicks which he instantly administered to the footboard. While the car still hung in the gateway, a donkey, with a boy sitting on the far end of its back, was suddenly mingled with the episode. The boy was off the donkey's back and the driver was off mine at apparently one and the same moment, and the car was somehow backed off the pillar; as we scraped through the boy said something to the driver in a brogue that was a shade more sophisticated than the peasant tune. It seemed to me to convey the facts that Miss Lynie was waiting

for her hat, and that Maggie Kane was dancing mad for the soft sugar. We proceeded to the house, leaving the ground strewn with what appeared to be the elemental stage of a picnic.

"I suppose you're getting him into form for the hunt, Eugene?" said Dr. Hickey, as the lathered and panting chestnut came to a stand some ten yards beyond the hall door.

"Well, indeed, we thought it no harm to loosen him under the car before Master Eddy went riding him," replied Eugene, "and begannies I'm not done with him yet! I have to be before the masther at the next thrain."

He shed us and our belongings on the steps, and drove away at a gallop.

The meet had been arranged for half-past eleven. It was half-past ten when Dr. Hickey and I were incarcerated in a dungeon-cold drawing-room by a breathless being in tennis shoes, with her hair down her back, doubtless Maggie Kane, hot from the war-dance brought on by the lack of soft sugar. She told us in a gusty whisper that the masther would be in shortly, and the ladies was coming down, and left us to meditate upon our surroundings.

A cascade of white paper flowed glacially from the chimney to the fender; the gloom was Cimmerian, and unalterable, owing to the fact that the blind was broken; the cold of a never occupied room ate into our vitals. Footsteps pounded

overhead and crept in the hall. The house was obviously full of people, but no one came near us. Had it not been for my companion's biographical comments on the photographs with which the room was decked, all of them, it appeared, suitors of the Misses Flynn, I think I should have walked back to the station. At eleven o'clock the hurrying feet overhead were stilled, there was a rustling in the hall as of a stage storm, and the daughters of the house made their entry, wonderfully attired in gowns suggestive of a theatre, or a tropical garden party, and in picture hats. As I viewed the miracles of hairdressing, black as the raven's wing, the necklaces, the bracelets, and the lavish top-dressing of powder, I wildly wondered if Dr. Hickey and I should not have been in evening clothes.

We fell to a laboured conversation, conducted upon the highest social plane. The young ladies rolled their black eyes under arched eyebrows, and in almost unimpeachable English accents supposed I found Ireland very dull. They asked me if I often went to the London Opera. They declared that when at home, music was their only resource, and made such pointed reference to their Italian duets that I found myself trembling on the verge of asking them to sing. Dr. Hickey, under whose wing I had proposed to shelter myself, remained sardonically aloof. A blessed diversion was created

by the entrance, at racing speed, of Maggie Kane, bearing a trayful of burning sods of turf; the cascade was torn from the chimney, and the tray was emptied into the grate. Blinding smoke filled the room, and Maggie Kane murmured an imprecation upon "jackdahs," their nests, and all their works.

The moment seemed propitious for escape; I looked at my watch, and said that if they would kindly tell me the way to the yard I would go round and see about things.

The arched eyebrows went up a shade higher; the Misses Flynn said they feared they hardly knew the way to the stables.

Dr. Hickey rose. "Indeed it isn't easy to find them," he said, "but I daresay the Major and myself will be able to make them out."

When we got outside he looked down his long nose at me.

"Stables indeed!" he said, "I hate that dirty little boasting!"

Mr. Flynn's yard certainly did not at the first glance betray the presence of stables. It consisted of an indeterminate assembly of huts, with a long corrugated iron shed standing gauntly in the midst; swamp of varying depths and shades occupied the intervals. From the shed proceeded the lamentable and indignant clamours of the hounds, against its door leaned Michael in his red coat, enacting,

obviously, the rôle of a righteous man constrained to have his habitation in the tents of Kedar. A reverential knot of boys admired him from the wall of a neighbouring pigsty; countrymen of all ages, each armed with a stick and shadowed by a cur, more or less resembling a fox-hound, stood about in patient groups; two or three dejected horses were nibbling, unattended, at a hayrick. Of our host there was no sign.

At the door of the largest hut Slipper was standing.

"Come in and see the mare, Major," he called to me in his bantam-cock voice as I approached. "Last night when we got in she was clean dead altogether, but this morning when I was giving the feed to the pony she retched out her neck and met her teeth in me poll! Oh, she's in great heart now!"

In confirmation of this statement a shrewish squeal from Lady Jane proceeded from the interior.

"Sure I slep' in the straw last night with herself and the pony. She'd have him ate this morning only for me."

The record of his devotion was here interrupted by a tremendous rattling in the farm lane; it heralded the entrance of Mr. Flynn on his outside car, drawn at full gallop by the young chestnut horse.

"Oh, look at me, Major, how late I am!" shouted

Mr. Flynn jovially, as he scrambled off the car. "I declare you could light a candle at me eye with the shame that's in it, as they say! I was back in Curranhilty last night buying stock, and this was the first train I could get. Well, well, the day's long and drink's plenty!"

He bundled into a darksome hole, and emerged with a pair of dirty spurs and a Malacca crop as heavy as a spade handle.

"Michael! Did they tell you we have a fox for you in the hill north?"

"I wasn't speaking to any of them," replied Michael coldly.

"Well, your hounds will be speaking to him soon! Here, hurry boys, pull out the horses!"

His eye fell on the chestnut, upon whose reeking back Eugene was cramming a saddle, while the boy who had met us at the entrance gate was proffering to it a tin basin full of oats.

"What are you doing with the young horse?" he roared.

"I thought Master Eddy would ride him, sir," replied Eugene.

"Well, he will not," said Mr. Flynn, conclusively; "the horse has enough work done, and let you walk him about easy till he's cool. You can folly the hunt then."

Two more crestfallen countenances than those of the young gentlemen he addressed it has seldom

been my lot to see. The saddle was slowly removed. Master Eddy, red up to the roots of his black hair, retired silently with his basin of oats into the stable behind Slipper. Even had I not seen his cuff go to his eyes I should have realised that life would probably never hold for him a bitterer moment.

The hounds were already surging out of the yard with a following wave, composed of every living thing in sight. As I took Lady Jane from the hand of Slipper, Philippa's pony gave a snort. Some touch of Philippa's criminal weakness for boys assailed me.

"That boy can ride the pony if he likes," I said to Slipper.

I followed the hounds and their cortège down a deep and filthy lane. Mr. Flynn was just in front of me, on a broad-beamed white horse, with string-halt; three or four of the trencher-fed aliens slunk at his heels, the mouth of a dingy horn protruded from his coat pocket. I trembled in spirit as I thought of Michael.

We were out at length into large and furzy spaces that slanted steeply to the cliffs; like smuts streaming out of a chimney the followers of the hunt belched from the lane and spread themselves over the pale green slopes. From this point the proceedings became merged in total incoherence. Accompanied, as it seemed, by the whole population of the district, we moved *en masse* along the top of the cliffs,

while hounds, curs, and boys strove and scrambled below us, over rocks and along ledges, which, one might have thought, would have tried the head of a seagull. Two successive bursts of yelling notified the capture and slaughter of two rabbits; in the first hour and a half I can recall no other achievement.

It was, however, evident that hunting, in its stricter sense, was looked on as a mere species of side show by the great majority of the field; the cream of the entertainment was found in the negotiation of such jumps as fell to the lot of the riders. These were neither numerous nor formidable, but the storm of cheers that accompanied each performance would have dignified the win of a Grand National favourite.

To Master Eddy, on Philippa's pony, it was apparent that the birthday of his life had come. Attended by Slipper and a howling company of boon companions, he and the pony played a glorified game of pitch and toss, in which, as it seemed to me, heads never turned up. It certainly was an adverse circumstance that the pony's mane had, the day before, been hogged to the bone, so that at critical moments the rider slid, unchecked, from saddle to ears, but the boon companions, who themselves jumped like antelopes, stride for stride with the pony, replaced him unfailingly with timely snatches at whatever portion of his frame first offered itself.

Music, even, was not wanting to our progress. A lame fiddler, on a donkey, followed in our wake, filling Michael's cup of humiliation to the brim, by playing jigs during our frequent moments of inaction. The sun pushed its way out of the grey sky, the sea was grey, with a broad and flashing highway to the horizon, a frayed edge of foam tracked the broken coast-line, seagulls screamed and swooped, and the grass on the cliff summits was wondrous green. Old Flynn, on his white horse, moving along the verge, and bleating shrilly upon his horn to the hounds below, became idyllic.

I believe that I ought to have been in a towering passion, and should have swept the hounds home in a flood of blasphemy; as a matter of fact I enjoyed myself. Even Dr. Hickey admitted that it was as pleasant a day for smoking cigarettes as he had ever been out.

It must have been nearly three o'clock when one of Mr. Flynn's hounds, a venerable lady of lemon and white complexion, poked her lean head through furze bushes at the top of the cliff, and came up on to the level ground.

"That's old Terrible, Playboy's mother," remarked Dr. Hickey, "and a great stamp of an old hound too, but she can't run up now. Flynn tells me when she's beat out she'll sit down and yowl on the line, she's that fond of it."

Meantime Terrible was becoming busier and

looking younger every moment, as she zigzagged up and across the trampled field towards the hill-side. Dr. Hickey paused in the lighting of what must have been his tenth cigarette.

"If we were in a Christian country," he said, "you'd say she had a line——"

Old Flynn came pounding up on his white horse, and rode slowly up the hill behind Terrible, who silently pursued her investigations. Fifty or sixty yards higher up, my eye lighted on something that might have been a rusty can, or a wisp of bracken, lying on the sunny side of a bank. As I looked, it moved, and slid away over the top of the bank. A yell, followed by a frenzied tootling on Mr. Flynn's ancient horn, told that he had seen it too, and, in a bedlam of shrieks, chaos was upon us. Through an inextricable huddle of foot people the hounds came bursting up from the cliffs, fighting every foot of ground with the country-boys, yelping with the contagion of excitement, they broke through, and went screaming up the hill to old Terrible, who was announcing her find in deep and continuous notes.

How Lady Jane got over the first bank without trampling Slipper and two men under foot is known only to herself; as I landed, Master Eddy and the pony banged heavily into me from the rear, the pony having once and for all resolved not to be sundered by more than a yard from his stable com-

panion of the night before. I can safely say that I have never seen hounds run faster than did Mr. Knox's and the trencher-feds, in that brief scurry from the cliffs at Knockeenbwee. By the time we had crossed the second fence the foot people were gone, like things in a dream. In front of me was Michael, and, in spite of Michael's spurs, in front of Michael was old Flynn, holding the advantage of his start with a most admirable jealousy. The white horse got over the ground in bucks like a rabbit, the string-halt lending an additional fire to his gait; on every bank his great white hind-quarters stood up against the sky, like the gable end of a chapel. Had I had time to think of anything, I should have repented acutely of having lent Master Eddy the pony, who was practically running away. Twice I replaced his rider in the saddle with one hand, as he landed off a fence under my stirrup. Master Eddy had lost his cap and whip, his hair was full of mud, pure ecstasy stretched his grin from ear to ear, and broke from him in giggles of delight.

Providentially, it was, as I have said, only a scurry. It seemed that we had run across the neck of a promontory, and in ten minutes we were at the cliffs again, the company reduced to old Flynn, his son, and the Hunt establishment. Below us Moyny Bay was spread forth, enclosing in its span a big green island; between us and the island

was a good hundred yards of mud, plump-looking mud, with channels in it. Deep in this the hounds were wading; some of them were already ashore on the island, struggling over black rocks thatched with yellow seaweed, their voices coming faintly back to us against the wind. The white horse's tail was working like a fan, and we were all, horses and men, blowing hard enough to turn a windmill.

"That's better fun than to be eating your dinner!" puffed Mr. Flynn, purple with pride and heat, as he lowered himself from the saddle. "There isn't a hound in Ireland would take that stale line up from the cliff only old Terrible!"

"What will we do now, sir?" said Michael to me, presenting the conundrum with colourless calm, and ignoring the coat-tail trailed for his benefit, "we'll hardly get them out of that island to-night."

"I suppose you know you're bare-footed, Major?" put in Hickey, my other Job's comforter, from behind. "Your two fore-shoes are gone."

A December day is not good for much after half-past three. For half an hour the horns of Michael and old Flynn blew their summons antiphonally into the immensities of sea and sky, and summoned only the sunset, and after it the twilight; the hounds remained unresponsive, invisible.

"There's rabbits enough in that island to keep ten packs of hounds busy for a month," said Mr.

Flynn ; " the last time I was there I thought 'twas the face of the field was running from me. And what was it after all but the rabbits ! "

" *My* hounds wouldn't hunt rabbits if they were throwing after them," said Michael ferociously.

" Oh, I suppose it's admiring the view they are ! " riposted Mr. Flynn ; " I tell ye now, Major, there's a man on the strand below has a flat-bottomed boat, and here's Eugene just come up. I'll send him over with the horn as soon as there's water enough, and he'll flog them out of it."

The tide crept slowly in over the mud, and a young moon was sending a slender streak of light along it through the dusk before Eugene had accomplished his mission.

The boat returned at last across the channel with a precarious cargo of three hounds, while the rest splashed and swam after her.

" I have them all, only one," shouted Eugene as he jumped ashore and came scrambling up the steep slants and shaley ledges of the cliff.

" I hope it isn't Terrible ye left after ye ? " roared Mr. Flynn.

" Faith, I don't know which is it it is. I seen him down from me floating in the tide. It must be he was clifted. I think 'tis one of Major Yeates's. We have our own whatever."

A cold feeling ran down my back. Michael and Hickey silently conned over the pack in the growing

darkness, striking matches and shielding them in their hands as they told off one hound after another, hemmed in by an eager circle of countrymen.

"It's Playboy's gone," said Michael, with awful brevity. "I suppose we may go home now, sir?"

"Ah! hold on, hold on," put in Mr. Flynn, "are ye sure now, Eugene, it wasn't a sheep ye saw? I wouldn't wish it for five pounds that the Major lost a hound by us."

"Did ye ever see a sheep with yalla spots on her?" retorted Eugene.

A shout of laughter instantly broke from the circle of sympathisers. I mounted Lady Jane in gloomy silence; there was nothing for it but to face the long homeward road, minus Flurry Knox's best hound, and with the knowledge that while I lived this day's work would not be forgotten to me by him, by Dr. Hickey, and by Michael.

It was Hickey who reminded me that I was also minus two fore-shoes, and that it was an eighteen-mile ride. On my responding irritably that I was aware of both facts, and would get the mare shod at the forge by the station, Mr. Flynn, whose voluble and unceasing condolences had not been the least of my crosses, informed me that the smith had gone away to his father-in-law's wake, and that there wasn't another forge between that and Skebawn.

The steps by which the final disposition of events was arrived at need not here be recounted. It

need only be said that every star went out of its course to fight against me ; even the special luminary that presided over the Curranhilty and Skebawn branch railway was hostile ; I was told that the last train did not run except on Saturdays. Therefore it was that, in a blend of matchlight and moonlight, a telegram was written to Philippa, and, at the hour at which Dr. Hickey, the hounds, and Michael were nearing their journey's end, I was seated at the Knockeenbwee dinner-table, tired, thoroughly annoyed, devoured with sleep, and laboriously discoursing of London and Paris with the younger Miss Flynn.

A meal that had opened at six with strong tea, cold mutton, and bottled porter, was still, at eight o'clock, in slow but unceasing progress, suggesting successive inspirations on the part of the cook. At about seven we had had mutton chops and potatoes, and now, after an abysmal interval of conversation, we were faced by a roast goose and a rice pudding with currants in it. Through all these things had gone the heavy sounds and crashes that betokened the conversion of the drawing-room into a sleeping-place for me. There was, it appeared, no spare room in the house ; I felt positively abject at the thought of the trouble I was inflicting. My soul abhorred the roast goose, and was yet conscious that the only possible acknowledgment of the hospitality that was showered upon

me, was to eat my way unflinchingly through all that was put upon my plate.

It must have been nine o'clock before we turned our backs upon the pleasures of the table, and settled down to hot whisky-punch over a fierce turf fire. Then ensued upon my part one of the most prolonged death-grapples with sleep that it has been my lot to endure. The conversation of Mr. Flynn and his daughters passed into my brain like a narcotic; after circling heavily round various fashionable topics, it settled at length upon croquet, and it was about here that I began to slip from my moorings and drift softly towards unconsciousness. I pulled myself up on the delicious verge of a dream to agree with the statement that "croquet was a fright! You'd boil a leg of mutton while you'd be waiting for your turn!"

Following on this came a period of oblivion, and then an agonised recovery. Where were we? Thank heaven, we were still at the croquet party, and Miss Lynie's narrative was continuing.

"That was the last place I saw Mary. Oh, she was mad! She was mad with me! 'I was born a lady,' says she, 'and I'll die a lady!' I never saw her after that day."

Miss Lynie, with an elegantly curved little finger, finished her wine-glass of toddy and awaited my comment.

I was, for the instant, capable only of blinking

like an owl, but was saved from disaster by Mr. Flynn.

"Indeed ye had no loss," he remarked. "She's like a cow that gives a good pail o' milk and spoils all by putting her leg in it!"

I said, "Quite so—exactly," while the fire, old Flynn, and the picture of a Pope over the chimney-piece, swam back into their places with a jerk.

The tale, or whatever it was, wound on. Nodding heavily, I heard how "Mary," at some period of her remarkable career, had been found "bawling in the kitchen" because Miss Flynn had refused to kiss her on both cheeks when she was going to bed, and of how, on that repulse, Mary had said that Miss Flynn was "squat." I am thankful to say that I retained sufficient control of my faculties to laugh ironically.

I think the story must then have merged into a description of some sort of entertainment, as I distinctly remember Miss Lynie saying that they "played 'Lodging-houses'—it was young Scully from Ennis made us do it—a very vulgar game *I* call it."

"I don't like that pullin' and draggin'," said Mr. Flynn.

I did not feel called upon to intrude my opinion upon the remarkable pastime in question, and the veils of sleep once more swathed me irresistibly in their folds. It seemed very long afterwards that the clang of a fire-iron pulled me up with

what I fear must have been an audible snort. Old Flynn was standing up in front of the fire; he had obviously reached the climax of a narrative: he awaited my comment.

"That—that must have been very nice," I said desperately.

"Nice!" echoed Mr. Flynn, and his astounded face shocked me into consciousness; "sure she might have burned the house down!"

What the catastrophe may have been I shall never know, nor do I remember how I shuffled out of the difficulty; I only know that at this point I abandoned the unequal struggle, and asked if I might go to bed.

The obligations of a troublesome and self-inflicted guest seal my lips as to the expedients by which the drawing-room had been converted into a sleeping-place for me. But though gratitude may enforce silence, it could not enforce sleep. The paralysing drowsiness of the parlour deserted me at the hour of need. The noises in the kitchen ceased, old Flynn pounded up to bed, the voices of the young ladies overhead died away, and the house sank into stillness, but I grew more wakeful every moment. I heard the creeping and scurrying of rats in the walls, I counted every tick, and cursed every quarter told off by a pragmatical cuckoo clock in the hall. By the time it had struck twelve I was on the verge of attacking it with the poker.

I suppose I may have dozed a little, but I was certainly aware that a long tract of time had elapsed since it had struck two, when a faint but regular creaking of the staircase impressed itself upon my ear. It was followed by a stealing foot in the hall; a hand felt over the door, and knocked very softly. I sat up in my diminutive stretcher-bed and asked who was there. The handle was turned, and a voice at the crack of the door said "It's me!"

Even in the two monosyllables I recognised the accents of the son of the house.

"I want to tell you something," pursued the voice.

I instantly surmised all possibilities of disaster; Slipper drunk and overlaid by Lady Jane, Philippa's pony dead from over-exertion, or even a further instalment of the evening meal, only now arrived at completion.

"What's the matter? Is anything wrong?" I demanded, raising myself in the trough of the bed.

"There is not; but I want to speak to you."

I had by this time found the matches, and my candle revealed Eddy Flynn, fully dressed save for his boots, standing in the doorway. He crept up to my bedside with elaborate stealth.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, attuning my voice to a conspirator's whisper.

"Playboy's above stairs!"

"Playboy!" I repeated incredulously, "what do you mean?"

"Eugene cot him. He's above in Eugene's room now," said the boy, his face becoming suddenly scarlet.

"Do you mean that he wasn't killed?" I demanded, instantly allocating in my own mind half a sovereign to Eugene.

"He wasn't in the island at all," faltered Master Eddy, "Eugene cot him below on the cliffs when the hounds went down in it at the first go off, and he hid him back in the house here."

The allotment of the half-sovereign was abruptly cancelled.

I swallowed my emotions with some difficulty.

"Well," I said, after an awkward pause, "I'm very much obliged to you for telling me. I'll see your father about it in the morning."

Master Eddy did not accept this as a dismissal. He remained motionless, except for his eyes, that sought refuge anywhere but on my face.

There was a silence for some moments; he was almost inaudible as he said:

"It would be better for ye to take him now, and to give him to Slipper. I'd be killed if they knew I let on he was here." Then, as an afterthought, "Eugene's gone to the wake."

The inner aspect of the affair began to reveal itself, accompanied by a singularly unbecoming

side light on old Flynn. I perceived also the useful part that had been played by Philippa's pony, but it did not alter the fact that Master Eddy was showing his gratitude like a hero. The situation was, however, too delicate to admit of comment.

"Very well," I said, without any change of expression, "will you bring the dog down to me?"

"I tried to bring him down with me, but he wouldn't let me put a hand on him."

I hastily got into the few garments of which I had not divested myself before getting into the misnamed stretcher-bed, aware that the horrid task was before me of burglariously probing the depths of Eugene's bedroom, and acutely uncertain as to Playboy's reception of me.

"There's a light above in the room," said Master Eddy, with a dubious glance at the candle in my hand.

I put it down, and followed him into the dark hall.

I have seldom done a more preposterous thing than creep up old Flynn's stairs in the small hours of the morning, in illicit search for my own property; but, given the dual determination to recover Playboy and to shield my confederate, I still fail to see that I could have acted otherwise.

We reached the first landing; it vibrated reassuringly with the enormous snores of Mr. Flynn. Master Eddy's cold paw closed on my hand, and led me to another and steeper flight of stairs. At the top of these was a second landing, or rather passage, at the end of which a crack of light showed under a door. A dim skylight told that the roof was very near my head; I extended a groping hand for the wall, and without any warning found my fingers closing improbably, awfully, upon a warm human face. I defy the most hardened conspirator to have refrained from some expression of opinion.

"Good Lord!" I gasped, starting back, and knocking my head hard against a rafter. "What's that?"

"It's Maggie Kane, sir!" hissed a female voice. "I'm after bringing up a bone for the dog to quieten him!"

That Maggie Kane should also be in the plot was a complication beyond my stunned intelligence; I grasped only the single fact that she was an ally, endued with supernatural and sympathetic forethought. She placed in my hand a tepid and bulky fragment, which, even in the dark, I recognised as the mighty drumstick of last night's goose; at the same moment Master Eddy opened the door, and revealed Playboy, tied to the leg of a low wooden bedstead.

He was standing up, his eyes gleamed green as emeralds, he looked as big as a calf. He obviously regarded himself as the guardian of Eugene's bower, and I failed to see any recognition of me in his aspect, in point of fact he appeared to be on the verge of an outburst of suspicion that would waken the house once and for all. We held a council of war in whispers that perceptibly increased his distrust ; I think it was Maggie Kane who suggested that Master Eddy should proffer him the bone while I unfastened the rope. The strategy succeeded, almost too well in fact. Following the alluring drumstick Playboy burst into the passage, towing me after him on the rope. Still preceded by the light-footed Master Eddy, he took me down the attic stairs at a speed which was the next thing to a headlong fall, while Maggie Kane held the candle at the top. As we stormed past old Flynn's door I was aware that the snoring had ceased, but " the pace was too good to inquire." We scrimmaged down the second flight into the darkness of the hall, fetching up somewhere near the clock, which, as if to give the alarm, uttered three loud and poignant cuckoos. I think Playboy must have sprung at it, in the belief that it was the voice of the drumstick ; I only know that my arm was nearly wrenched from its socket, and that the clock fell with a crash from the table to the floor, where, by some malevolence of its machinery, it continued to cuckoo with jocund

and implacable persistence. Something that was not Playboy bumped against me. The cuckoo's note became mysteriously muffled, and a door, revealing a fire-lit kitchen, was shoved open. We struggled through it, bound into a sheaf by Playboy's rope, and in our midst the cuckoo clock, stifled but indomitable, continued its protest from under Maggie Kane's shawl.

In the kitchen we drew breath for the first time, and Maggie Kane put the cuckoo clock into a flour bin; the house remained still as the grave. Master Eddy opened the back door; behind his head the Plough glittered wakefully in a clear and frosty sky. It was uncommonly cold.

Slipper had not gone to the wake, and was quite sober. I shall never forget it to him. I told him that Playboy had come back, and was to be taken home at once. He asked no inconvenient questions, but did not deny himself a most dissolute wink. We helped him to saddle the pony, while Playboy crunched his hard-earned drumstick in the straw. In less than ten minutes he rode quietly away in the starlight, with Playboy trotting at his stirrup, and Playboy's rope tied to his arm.

I did not meet Mr. Flynn at breakfast; he had started early for a distant fair. I have, however, met him frequently since then, and we are on the best of terms. We have not shirked allusions to the day's hunting at Knockeenbwee, but Playboy

has not on these occasions been mentioned by either of us.

'I understand that Slipper has put forth a version of the story, in which the whole matter is resolved into a trial of wits between himself and Eugene. With this I have not interfered.

VI

THE BOAT'S SHARE

I WAS sitting on the steps of Shreelane House. smoking a cigarette after breakfast. By the calendar, the month was November, by the map it was the South-west of Ireland, but by every token that hot sun and soft breeze could offer it was the Riviera in April.

Maria, my wife's water spaniel, elderly now, but unimpaired in figure. and in character merely fortified in guile by the castigations of seven winters, reclined on the warm limestone flags beside me. Minx, the nursery fox-terrier, sat, as was her practice, upon Maria's ribs, nodding in slumber. All was peace.

Peace, I say, but even as I expanded in it and the sunshine, there arose to me from the kitchen window in the area the voice of Mrs. Cadogan, uplifted in passionate questioning.

"Bridgie!" it wailed. "Where's me beautiful head and me lovely feet?"

The answer to this amazing inquiry travelled shrilly from the region of the scullery.

"Bilin' in the pot, ma'am."

I realised that it was merely soup in its elemental stage that was under discussion, but Peace spread her wings at the cry; it recalled the fact that Philippa was having a dinner party that same night. In a small establishment such as mine, a dinner party is an affair of many aspects, all of them serious. The aspect of the master of the house, however, is not serious, it is merely contemptible. Having got out the champagne, and reverentially decanted the port, there remains for him no further place in the proceedings, no moment in which his presence is desired. If, at such a time, I wished to have speech with my wife, she was not to be found; if I abandoned the search and stationed myself in the hall, she would pass me, on an average, twice in every three minutes, generally with flowers in her hands, always with an expression so rapt as to abash all questionings. I therefore sat upon the steps and read the paper, superfluous to all save the dogs, to whom I at least offered a harbourage in the general stress.

Suddenly, and without a word of warning, Minx and Maria were converted from a slumbrous mound into twin comets—comets that trailed a continuous shriek of rage as they flew down the avenue. The cause of the affront presently revealed itself, in the form of a tall woman, with a shawl over her head, and a basket on her arm. She advanced unfalteringly,

Minx walking on her hind legs beside her, as if in a circus, attentively smelling the basket, while Maria bayed her at large in the background. She dropped me a curtsey fit for the Lord Lieutenant.

"Does your Honour want any fish this morning?" Her rippling grey hair gleamed like silver in the sunlight, her face was straight-browed and pale, her grey eyes met mine with respectful self-possession. She might have been Deborah the prophetess, or the Mother of the Gracchi; as a matter of fact I recognised her as a certain Mrs. Honora Brickley, mother of my present kitchenmaid, a lady whom, not six months before, I had fined in a matter of trespass and assault.

"They're lovely fish altogether!" she pursued, "they're leppin' fresh!"

Here was the chance to make myself useful. I called down the area and asked Mrs. Cadogan if she wanted fish. (It may or may not be necessary to mention that my cook's name is locally pronounced "Caydogawn.")

"What fish is it, sir?" replied Mrs. Cadogan, presenting at the kitchen window a face like a harvest moon.

"'Tis pollock, ma'am!" shouted Mrs. Brickley from the foot of the steps.

"'Sha! thim's no good to us!" responded the harvest moon in bitter scorn. "Thim's not company fish!"

I was here aware of the presence of my wife in the doorway, with a menu-slate in one hand, and one of my best silk pocket-handkerchiefs, that had obviously been used as a duster, in the other.

"Filleted with white sauce—" she murmured to herself, a world of thought in her blue eyes, "or perhaps quenelles——"

Mrs. Brickley instantly extracted a long and shapely pollock from her basket, and, with eulogies of its beauty, of Philippa's beauty, and of her own magnanimity in proffering her wares to us instead of to a craving market in Skebawn, laid it on the steps.

At this point a series of yells from the nursery, of the usual blood-curdling description, lifted Philippa from the scene of action as a wind whirls a feather.

"Buy them!" came back to me from the stairs.

I kept to myself my long-formed opinion that eating pollock was like eating boiled cotton wool with pins in it, and the bargain proceeded. The affair was almost concluded, when Mrs. Brickley, in snatching a fish from the bottom of her basket, to complete an irresistible half-dozen, let it slip from her fingers. It fell at my feet, revealing a mangled and gory patch on its side.

"Why, then, that's the best fish I have!" declared Mrs. Brickley in response to my protest.

"That's the very one her honour Mrs. Yeates would fancy! She'd always like to see the blood running fresh!"

This flight of sympathetic insight did not deter me from refusing the injured pollock, coupled with a regret that Mrs. Brickley's cat should have been interrupted in its meal.

Mrs. Brickley did not immediately reply. She peeped down the area, she glanced into the hall.

"Cat is it!" she said, sinking her voice to a mysterious whisper. "Your Honour knows well, God bless you, that it was no cat done that!"

Obedient to the wholly fallacious axiom that those who ask no questions will be told no lies, I remained silent.

"Only for the luck of God being on me they'd have left meself no betther than they left the fish!" continued Mrs. Brickley. "Your Honour didn't hear what work was in it on Hare Island Strand last night? Thim Keohanes had the wooden leg pulled from undher me husband with the len'th o' fightin'! Oh! Thim's outlawed altogether, and the faymales is as manly as the men! Sure the polis theirselves does be in dhread of thim women! The day-and-night-screeching porpoises!"

Seven years of Resident Magistracy had bestowed upon me some superficial knowledge of whither all this tended. I rose from the steps, with the stereotyped statement that if there was to be a

case in court I could not listen to it beforehand. I then closed the hall door, not, however, before Mrs. Brickley had assured me that I was the only gentleman, next to the Lord Almighty, in whom she had any confidence.

The next incident in the affair occurred at about a quarter to eight that evening. I was tying my tie when my wife's voice summoned me to her room in tones that presaged disaster. Philippa was standing erect, in a white and glittering garment. Her eyes shone, her cheeks glowed. It is not given to every one to look their best when they are angry, but it undoubtedly is becoming to Philippa.

"I ask you to look at my dress," she said in a level voice.

"It looks very nice—" I said cautiously, knowing there was a trap somewhere. "I know it, don't I?"

"Know it!" replied Philippa witheringly, "did you know that it had only one sleeve?"

She extended her arms; from one depended vague and transparent films of whiteness, the other was bare to the shoulder. I rather preferred it of the two.

"Well, I can't say I did," I said helplessly; "is that a new fashion?"

There was a spectral knock at the door, and Hannah, the housemaid, slid into the room, purple of face, abject of mien.

"It's what they're afther tellin' me, ma'am," she panted. "'Twas took to sthrain the soup!"

"They took my sleeve to strain the soup!" repeated Philippa, in a crystal clarity of wrath.

"She said she got it in the press in the passage, ma'am, and she thought you were afther throwin' it," murmured Hannah, with a glance that implored my support.

"Who are you speaking of?" demanded Philippa, looking quite six feet high.

The situation, already sufficiently acute, was here intensified by the massive entry of Mrs. Cadogan, bearing in her hand a plate, on which was a mound of soaked brownish rag. She was blowing hard, the glare of the kitchen range at highest power lived in her face.

"There's your sleeve, ma'am!" she said, "and if I could fall down dead this minute it'd be no more than a relief to me! And as for Bridgie Brickley!" continued Mrs. Cadogan, catching her wind with a gasp, "I thravelled many genthry's kitchens, but thanks be to God, I never seen the like of her! Five weeks to-morrow she's in this house, and there isn't a day but I gave her a laceratin'! Sure the hair's droppin' out o' me head, and the skin rollin' off the soles o' me feet with the heart scald I get with her! The big, low, dirty buccaneer! And I declare to you, ma'am, and to the Major, that I have a pain

switching out through me hips this minute that'd bring down a horse ! "

" Oh God ! " said Hannah, clapping her hand over her mouth.

My eye met Philippa's ; some tremor of my inward agony declared itself, and found its fellow on her quivering lips. In the same instant, wheels rumbled in the avenue.

" Here are the Knoxes ! " I exclaimed, escaping headlong from the room with my dignity as master of the house still intact.

Dinner, though somewhat delayed by these agitations, passed off reasonably well. Its occasion was the return from the South African war of my landlord and neighbour, Mr. Florence McCarthy Knox, M.F.H., J.P., who had been serving his country in the Yeomanry for the past twelve months. The soup gave no hint of its cannibalistic origin, and was of a transparency that did infinite credit to the services of Philippa's sleeve ; the pollock, chastely robed in white sauce, held no suggestion of a stormy past, nor, it need scarcely be said, did they foreshadow their influence on my future. As they made their circuit of the table I aimed a communing glance at my wife, who, serene in pale pink and conversation with Mr. Knox, remained unresponsive.

How the volcano that I knew to be raging below in the kitchen could have brought forth anything more edible than molten paving stones I was at a loss

to imagine. Had Mrs. Cadogan sent up Bridget Brickley's head as an *entremet* it would not, indeed, have surprised me. I could not know that as the gong sounded for dinner Miss Brickley had retired to her bed in strong hysterics, announcing that she was paralysed, while Mrs. Cadogan, rapt by passion to an ecstasy of achievement, coped single-handed with the emergency.

At breakfast time next morning Philippa and I were informed that the invalid had at an early hour removed herself and her wardrobe from the house, requisitioning for the purpose my donkey-cart and the attendance of my groom, Peter Cadogan; a proceeding on which the comments of Peter's aunt, Mrs. Cadogan, left nothing to be desired.

The affair on the strand at Hare Island ripened, with infinite complexity of summonses and cross-summonses, into an imposing Petty Sessions case. Two separate deputations presented themselves at Shreelane, equipped with black eyes and other conventional injuries, one of them armed with a creelful of live lobsters to underline the argument. To decline the bribe was of no avail: the deputation decanted them upon the floor of the hall and retired, and the lobsters spread themselves at large over the house, and to this hour remain the nightmare of the nursery.

The next Petty Sessions day was wet; the tall windows of the Court House were grey and stream-

ing, and the reek of wet humanity ascended to the ceiling. As I took my seat on the bench I perceived with an inward groan that the services of the two most eloquent solicitors in Skebawn had been engaged. This meant that Justice would not have run its course till heaven knew what dim hour of the afternoon, and that that course would be devious and difficult.

All the pews and galleries (any Irish court-house might, with the addition of a harmonium, pass presentably as a dissenting chapel) were full, and a line of flat-capped policemen stood like church-wardens near the door. Under the galleries, behind what might have answered to choir-stalls, the witnesses and their friends hid in darkness, which could, however, but partially conceal two resplendent young ladies, barmaids, who were to appear in a subsequent Sunday drinking case. I was a little late, and when I arrived Flurry Knox, supported by a couple of other magistrates, was in the chair, imperturbable of countenance as was his wont, his fair and delusive youthfulness of aspect unimpaired by his varied experiences during the war, his roving, subtle eye untamed by four years of matrimony.

A woman was being examined, a square and ugly country-woman, with wispy fair hair, a slow, dignified manner, and a slight and impressive stammer. I recognised her as one of the bodyguard of the lobsters. Mr. Mooney, solicitor for the Brickleys,

widely known and respected as "Roaring Jack," was in possession of that much-enduring organ, the ear of the Court.

"Now, Kate Keohane!" he thundered, "tell me what time it was when all this was going on?"

"About duskish, sir. Con Brickley was slashing the f-fish at me mother the same time. He never said a word but to take the shtick and fire me dead with it on the sthrand. He gave me plenty of blood to dhrink too," said the witness with acid decorum. She paused to permit this agreeable fact to sink in, and added, "his wife wanted to f-fashten on me the same time, an' she havin' the steer of the boat to sthrike me."

These were not precisely the facts that Mr. Mooney, as solicitor for the defence, wished to elicit.

"Would you kindly explain what you mean by the steer of the boat?" he demanded, sparring for wind in as intimidating a manner as possible. The witness stared at him.

"Sure 'tis the shtick, like, that they pulls here and there to go in their choice place."

"We may presume that the lady is referring to the tiller," said Mr. Mooney, with a facetious eye at the Bench. "Maybe now, ma'am, you can explain to us what sort of a boat is she?"

"She's that owld that if it wasn't for the weeds that's holding her together she'd bursht up in the deep."

"And who owns this valuable property?" pursued Mr. Mooney.

"She's between Con Brickley and me brother, an' the saine is between four, an' whatever crew does be in it should get their share, and the boat has a man's share."

I made no attempt to comprehend this, relying with well-founded confidence on Flurry Knox's grasp of such enigmas.

"Was Con Brickley fishing the same day?"

"He was not, sir. He was at Lisheen Fair; for as clever as he is, he couldn't kill two birds under one slat!"

Kate Keohane's voice moved unhurried from sentence to sentence, and her slow pale eyes turned for an instant to the lair of the witnesses under the gallery.

"And you're asking the Bench to believe that this decent man left his business in Lisheen in order to slash fish at your mother?" said Mr. Mooney truculently.

"B'lieve me, sorra much business he laves afther him wherever he'll go!" returned the witness, "himself and his wife had business enough on the sthrand when the fish was dividing, and it's then themselves put every name on me."

"Ah, what harm are names!" said Mr. Mooney, dallying elegantly with a massive watch-chain. "Come now, ma'am! will you swear you got any

ill-usage from Con Brickley or his wife ? " He leaned over the front of his pew, and waited for the answer with his massive red head on one side.

" I was givin' blood like a c-cow that ye'd shtab with a knife ! " said Kate Keohane, with unshaken dignity. " If it was yourself that was in it ye'd feel the smart as well as me. My hand and word on it, ye would ! The marks is on me head still, like the prints of dog-bites ! "

She lifted a lock of hair from her forehead, and exhibited a sufficiently repellent injury. Flurry Knox leaned forward.

" Are you sure you haven't that since the time there was that business between yourself and the postmistress at Munig ? I'm told you had the name of the office on your forehead where she struck you with the office stamp ! Try now, sergeant, can you read Munig on her forehead ? "

The Court, not excepting its line of church-wardens, dissolved into laughter ; Kate Keohane preserved an offended silence.

" I suppose you want us to believe," resumed Mr. Mooney sarcastically, " that a fine hearty woman like you wasn't defending yourself ! " Then with a turkey-cock burst of fury, " On your oath now ! What did you strike Honora Brickley with ? Answer me that now ! What had you in your hand ? "

" I had nothing only the little rod I had afther

the ass," answered Miss Keohane, with childlike candour. "I done nothing to them; but as for Con Brickley he put his back to the cliff and he took the flannel wrop that he had on him, and he threwn it on the sthrand, and he said he should have Blood, Murdher, or F-Fish!"

She folded her shawl across her breast, a picture of virtue assailed, yet unassailable.

"You may go down now," said "Roaring Jack" rather hastily, "I want to have a few words with your brother."

Miss Keohane retired, without having moulted a feather of her dignity, and her brother Jer came heavily up the steps and on to the platform, his hot, wary, blue eyes gathering in the Bench and the attorneys in one bold comprehensive glance. He was a tall, dark man of about five and forty, clean-shaved, save for two clerical inches of black whiskers, and in feature of the type of a London clergyman who would probably preach on Browning.

"Well, sir!" began Mr. Mooney stimulatingly, "and are you the biggest blackguard from here to America?"

"I am not," said Jer Keohane tranquilly.

"We had you here before us not so very long ago about kicking a goat, wasn't it? You got a little touch of a pound, I think?"

This delicate allusion to a fine that the Bench had thought fit to impose did not distress the witness.

"I did, sir."

"And how's our friend the goat?" went on Mr. Mooney, with the furious facetiousness reserved for hustling tough witnesses.

"Well, I suppose she's something west of the Skelligs by now," replied Jer Keohane with great composure.

An appreciative grin ran round the court. The fact that the goat had died of the kick and been "given the cliff" being regarded as an excellent jest.

Mr. Mooney consulted his notes:

"Well, now, about this fight," he said pleasantly, "did you see your sister catch Mrs. Brickley and pull her hair down to the ground and drag the shawl off of her?"

"Well," said the witness airily, "they had a little bit of a scratch on account o' the fish. Con Brickley had the shteer o' the boat in his hand and says he, 'is there any man here that'll take the shteer from me?' The man was dhrunk, of course," added Jer charitably.

"Did you have any talk with his wife about the fish?"

"I couldn't tell the words that she said to me!" replied the witness, with a reverential glance at the Bench, "and she over-right three crowds o' men that was on the sthrand."

Mr. Mooney put his hands in his pockets and surveyed the witness.

"You're a very refined gentleman, upon my word! Were you ever in England?"

"I was part of three years."

"Oh, that accounts for it, I suppose!" said Mr. Mooney, accepting this lucid statement without a stagger, and passing lightly on. "You're a widower, I understand, with no objection to consoling yourself?"

No answer.

"Now, sir! Can you deny that you made proposals of marriage to Con Brickley's daughter last Shraft?"

The plot thickened. Con Brickley's daughter was my late kitchenmaid.

Jer Keohane smiled tolerantly.

"Ah! That was a thing o' nothing!"

"Nothing!" said Mr. Mooney, with the roar of a tornado, "do you call an impudent proposal of marriage to a respectable man's daughter nothing? That's English manners, I suppose!"

"I was goin' home one Sunday," said Jer Keohane, conversationally to the Bench, "and I met the gerr'l and her mother. I spoke to the gerr'l in a friendly way, and asked her why wasn't she gettin' marrid, and she commenced to peg stones at me and dhrew several blows of an umbrella on me. I had only three bottles o' porther taken. There now was the whole of it."

Mrs. Brickley, from under the gallery, groaned heavily and ironically.

I found it difficult to connect these coquetries with my impressions of my late kitchenmaid, a furtive and touzled being, who, in conjunction with a pail and scrubbing brush, had been wont to melt round corners and into doorways at my approach.

"Are we trying a breach of promise case?" interpolated Flurry, "if so, we ought to have the plaintiff in."

"My purpose, sir," said Mr. Mooney, in a manner discouraging to levity, "is to show that my clients have received annoyance and contempt from this man and his sister such as no parents would submit to."

A hand came forth from under the gallery and plucked at Mr. Mooney's coat. A red monkey face appeared out of the darkness, and there was a hoarse whisper whose purport I could not gather. Con Brickley, the defendant, was giving instructions to his lawyer.

It was perhaps as a result of these that Jer Keohane's evidence closed here. There was a brief interval, enlivened by coughs, grinding of heavy boots on the floor, and some mumbling and groaning under the gallery.

"There's great duck-shooting out on a lake on this island," commented Flurry to me, in a whisper. "My grand-uncle went there one time with an old duck-gun he had, that he fired with a fuse. He was three hours stalking the ducks before he got the

gun laid. He lit the fuse then, and it set to work sputtering and hissing like a goods-engine till there wasn't a duck within ten miles. The gun went off then."

This useful side light on the matter in hand was interrupted by the cumbrous ascent of the one-legged Con Brickley to the witness-table. He sat down heavily, with his slouch hat on his sound knee, and his wooden stump stuck out before him. His large monkey-face was immovably serious; his eye was small, light grey, and very quick.

McCaffery, the opposition attorney, a thin, restless youth, with ears like the handles of an urn, took him in hand. To the pelting cross-examination that beset him Con Brickley replied with sombre deliberation, and with a manner of uninterested honesty, emphasising what he said with slight, very effective gestures of his big, supple hands. His voice was deep and pleasant; it betrayed no hint of so trivial a thing as satisfaction when, in the teeth of Mr. McCaffery's leading questions, he established the fact that the "little rod" with which Miss Kate Keohane had beaten his wife was the handle of a pitchfork.

"I was counting the fish the same time," went on Con Brickley, in his rolling basso profundissimo, "and she said, 'Let the divil clear me out of the sthrand, for there's no one else will put me out!' says she."

"It was then she got the blow, I suppose!" said McCaffery venomously; "you had a stick yourself, I daresay?"

"Yes. I had a stick. I must have a stick," deep and mellow pathos was hinted at in the voice; "I am sorry to say. What could I do to her? A man with a wooden leg on a sthrand could do nothing!"

Something like a laugh ran round the back of the court. Mr. McCaffery's ears turned scarlet and became quite decorative. On or off a strand Con Brickley was not a person to be scored off easily.

His clumsy yet impressive descent from the witness-stand followed almost immediately, and was not the least telling feature of his evidence. Mr. Mooney surveyed his exit with the admiration of one artist for another, and rising, asked the Bench's permission to call Mrs. Brickley.

Mrs. Brickley, as she mounted to the platform, in the dark and nun-like severity of her long cloak, the stately blue cloth cloak that is the privilege of the Munster peasant woman, was an example of the rarely blended qualities of picturesqueness and respectability. As she took her seat in the chair, she flung the deep hood back on to her shoulders, and met the gaze of the Court with her grey head erect; she was a witness to be proud of.

"Now, Mrs. Brickley," said "Roaring Jack"

urbanely, " will you describe this interview between your daughter and Keohane."

" It was the last Sunday in Shrove, your Worship, Mr. Flurry Knox, and gentlemen," began Mrs. Brickley nimbly, " meself and me little gerr'l was comin' from mass, and Jer Keohane come up to us and got on in a most unmannerable way. He asked me daughter would she marry him. Me daughter told him she would not, quite friendly like. I'll tell ye no lie, gentlemen, she was teasing him with the umbrella the same time, an' he raised his shtick, and dhrew a sthroke on her in the back, an' the little gerr'l took up a small pebble of a stone and fired it at him. She put the umbrella up to his mouth, but she called him no names. But as for him, the names he put on her was to call her ' a nasty long slopeen of a proud thing, and a slopeen of a proud tinker.' "

" Very lover-like expressions ! " commented Mr. Mooney, doubtless stimulated by lady-like titters from the barmaids ; " and had this romantic gentleman made any previous proposals for your daughter ? "

" Himself had two friends over from across the water one night to make the match, a Sathurday it was, and they should land the lee side o' the island, for the wind was a fright," replied Mrs. Brickley, launching her tale with the power of easy narration that is bestowed with such amazing

liberality on her class; "the three o' them had dhrink taken, an' I went to shlap out the door agin them. Me husband said then we should let them in, if it was a Turk itself, with the rain that was in it. They were talking in it then till near the dawning, and in the latther end all that was between them was the boat's share."

"What do you mean by 'the boat's share'?" said I.

"'Tis the same as a man's share, me worshipful gintleman," returned Mrs. Brickley splendidly; "it goes with the boat always, afther the crew and the saine has their share got."

I possibly looked as enlightened as I felt by this exposition.

"You mean that Jer wouldn't have her unless he got the boat's share with her?" suggested Flurry.

"He said it over-right all that was in the house, and he reddening his pipe at the fire," replied Mrs. Brickley, in full-sailed response to the helm. "'D'ye think,' says I to him, 'that me daughter would leave a lovely situation, with a kind and tendher masther, for a mean, hungry blagyard like yerself,' says I, 'that's livin' always in this backwards place!' says I."

This touching expression of preference for myself, as opposed to Mr. Keohane, was received with expressionless respect by the Court. Flurry, with an impassive countenance, kicked me heavily under

cover of the desk. I said that we had better get on to the assault on the strand. Nothing could have been more to Mrs. Brickley's taste. We were minutely instructed as to how Katie Keohane drew the shawleen forward on Mrs. Brickley's head to stifle her; and how Norrie Keohane was fast in her hair. Of how Mrs. Brickley had then given a stroke upwards between herself and her face (whatever that might mean) and loosed Norrie from her hair. Of how she then sat down and commenced to cry from the use they had for her.

"'Twas all I done," she concluded, looking like a sacred picture, "I gave a sthroke of a pollock on them." Then, an after-thought, "an' if I did, 'twas myself was at the loss of the same pollock!"

I fixed my eyes immovably on my desk. I knew that the slightest symptom of intelligence on my part would instantly draw forth the episode of the fish-buying on the morning of the dinner party, with the rape of Philippa's sleeve, and the unjust aspersion on Miss Brickley following in due sequence, ending with the paralytic seizure and dignified departure of the latter to her parents' residence in Hare Island. The critical moment was averted by a question from Mr. Mooney.

"As for language," replied Mrs. Brickley, with clear eyes a little uplifted in the direction of the ceiling, "there was no name from heaven and hell but she had it on me, and wishin' the divil might

burn the two heels off me, and the like o' me wasn't in sivin parishes! And that was the clane part of the discoorse, yer Worships!"

Mrs. Brickley here drew her cloak more closely about her, as though to enshroud herself in her own refinement, and presented to the Bench a silence as elaborate as a drop scene. It implied, amongst other things, a generous confidence in the imaginative powers of her audience.

Whether or no this was misplaced, Mrs. Brickley was not invited further to enlighten the Court. After her departure the case droned on in inexhaustible rancour, and trackless complications as to the shares of the fish. Its ethics and its arithmetic would have defied the allied intellects of Solomon and Bishop Colenso. It was somewhere in that dead hour of the afternoon, when it is too late for lunch and too early for tea, that the Bench, wan with hunger, wound up the affair by impartially binding both parties in sheaves "to the Peace."

As a sub-issue I arranged with Mr. Knox to shoot duck on the one-legged man's land on Hare Island, as soon as should be convenient, and lightly dismissed from my mind my dealings, official and otherwise, with the House of Brickley.

But even as there are people who never give away old clothes, so are there people, of whom is Flurry Knox, who never dismiss anything from their minds.

VII

THE LAST DAY OF SHRAFT

It was not many days after the Keohane and Brickley trial that my wife's elderly step-brother, Maxwell Bruce, wrote to us to say that he was engaged in a tour through the Irish-speaking counties, and would look us up on his way from Kerry. The letter began "*O Bean uasal*," and broke into eruptions of Erse at various points, but the excerpts from Bradshaw were, fortunately, in the vernacular.

Philippa assured me she could read it all. During the previous winter she had had five lessons and a half in the Irish language from the National Schoolmaster, and believed herself to be one of the props of the Celtic movement. My own attitude with regard to the Celtic movement was sympathetic, but a brief inspection of the grammar convinced me that my sympathies would not survive the strain of tripthøngs, eclipsed consonants, and synthetic verbs, and that I should do well to refrain from embittering my declining years by an impotent

and humiliating pursuit of the most elusive of pronunciations. Philippa had attained to the height of being able to greet the schoolmaster in Irish, and, if the day happened to be fine, she was capable of stating the fact; other aspects of the weather, however remarkable, she epitomised in a brilliant smile, and the schoolmaster was generally considerate enough not to press the matter.

My step-brother-in-law neither hunted, shot, nor fished, yet as a guest he never gave me a moment's anxiety. He possessed the attribute, priceless in guests, a good portable hobby, involving no machinery, accessories, or paraphernalia of any kind. It did not even involve the personal attendance of his host. His mornings were spent in proffering Irish phrases to bewildered beggars at the hall door, or to the respectfully bored Peter Cadogan in the harness-room. He held *conversaziones* in the servants' hall after dinner, while I slept balmily in front of the drawing-room fire. When not thus engaged, he sat in his room making notes, and writing letters to the Archimandrites of his faith. Truly an ideal visitor, one to whom neglect was a kindness, and entertainments an abomination; certainly not a person to take to Hare Island to shoot ducks with Flurry Knox.

But it was otherwise ordained by Philippa. Hare Island was, she said, and the schoolmaster said, a place where the Irish language was still

spoken with a purity worthy of the Isles of Aran. Its folk-lore was an unworked mine, and it was moreover the home of one Shemus Ruadth, a singer and poet (and, I may add, a smuggler of tobacco) of high local renown: Maxwell should on no account miss such a chance. I mentioned that Hare Island was at present going through the measles phase of its usual rotation of epidemics. My wife wavered, in a manner that showed me that I had been on the verge of a family picnic, and I said I had heard that there was whooping-cough there too. The children had had neither. The picnic expired without a sound, but my step-brother-in-law had made up his mind.

It was a grey and bitter February morning when Maxwell and I, accompanied by Peter Cadogan, stood waiting on the beach at Yokahn for Flurry to arrive. Maria, as was her wont, was nosing my gun as if she expected to see a woodcock fly out of it; that Minx was beside her was due to the peculiar inveteracy of Minx. How she had achieved it is of no consequence; the distressing fact remained that she was there, seated, shuddering, upon a space of wet stone no larger than a sixpence, and had to be accepted as one of the party. It struck me that Mr. Cadogan had rather overdressed the part of dog-boy and bag-bearer, being attired in a striped blue flannel suit that had once been mine, a gaudy new cap, and yellow boots. The social possibilities

of Hare Island had faded from my mind ; I merely experienced the usual humiliation of perceiving how discarded garments can, in a lower sphere, renew their youth and blossom as the rose. I was even formulating a system of putting my old clothes out at grass, as it were, with Peter Cadogan, when a messenger arrived with a note from Flurry Knox in which he informed me, with many regrets, that he was kept at home on unexpected business, but he had arranged that we should find a boat ready to take us to the island, and Con Brickley would look after us when we got there. The boat was even now nearing the beach, rowed by two men, who, in beautiful accord with our "binding to the Peace," proved to be the Widower, Jer Keohane, and his late antagonist, the one-legged Con Brickley. In view of this millennial state of affairs it seemed alarmingly probable that the boat which had come for us was that on which, as on a pivot, the late battle had turned. A witness had said, on oath, that "if it wasn't for the weeds that's holding her together she'd bursht up in the deep." I inspected her narrowly, and was relieved to see that the weeds still held their ground.

A mile of slaty water tumbled between us and the island, and an undue proportion of it, highly flavoured by fish, flowed in uneasy tides in the bottom of the boat, with a final disposition towards the well-laden stern. There were no bottom boards, and,

judging by the depth of the flood over the keel, her draught appeared to be equal to that of a racing yacht. We sat precariously upon strips of nine-inch plank, our feet propped against the tarred sides just out of the wash; the boat climbed and wallowed with a three-cornered roll, the dogs panted in mingled nausea and agitation, and the narrow blades of the oars dipped their frayed edges in the waves in short and untiring jerks.

My brother-in-law, with a countenance leaden magenta from cold, struggled with the whirling leaves of a phrase-book. He was tall and thin, of the famished vegetarian type of looks, with unpractical prominent eyes, and a complexion that on the hottest day in summer imparted a chill to the beholder; in this raw November wind it was a positive suffering even to think of his nose, and my eyes rested, in unconscious craving for warmth, upon the changeless, impartial red of Con Brickley's monkey face.

We landed with a rush in the steep shingle of a sheltered cove. The island boasted a pier, built with "Relief" money, but it was two miles from the lake where I was to shoot, and this small triangle of beach, tucked away in a notch of the cliff, was within ten minutes' walk of it. At the innermost angle of the cove, where the notch ended in a tortuous fissure, there was a path that zigzagged to the top of the cliff, a remarkably excellent path,

and a well-worn one, with steps here and there. I commented on it to Mr. Brickley.

"Why, thin, it was in this same place that I losht the owld leg, sir," he replied in his sombre voice. "I took a shlip on a dark night, and me landlord was that much sorry for me that he made a good pat' in it." He was pitching himself up the steps on his crutches as he spoke, an object of compassion of the most obvious and silencing sort. Why, then, should Peter Cadogan smile furtively at the Widower?

At the top of the fissure, where it melted into a hollow between low, grassy hills, stood the Brickleys' cottage, long, low, and whitewashed, deep in shelter, with big stones, hung in halters of hay-rope, lying on its thatch, to keep the roof on in the Atlantic gales. A thick fuchsia hedge surrounded it; from its open door proceeded sounds of furious altercation; apparently a man and woman hurling invective and personalities at each other in Irish, at the tops of their voices. Con Brickley sprang forward on his crutch, a girl at the door vanished into the house, and a sudden silence fell. With scarcely a perceptible interval, Mrs. Brickley appeared in the doorway, a red shawl tied over her rippling grey hair, her manner an inimitable blend of deference and hospitality.

"Your Honour's welcome, Major Yeates," she said with a curtsey. A door banged at the back of the cottage. "That was a poor man from across the water that came apologisin' to me for dhrawin' me

name down in a little disagreement that he had about a settin' o' goose eggs."

I suppose that it was contrition that caused the apologist to stumble heavily as he came round the corner of the house and departed at a tangent through an opening in the fuchsia hedge. Feeling that comment on the incident was too delicate a matter for my capacities, I introduced Maxwell and his aspirations to the lady of the house. Any qualms that I might have had as to how to dispose of him while I was shooting were set at rest by Mrs. Brickley's instant grasp of the situation. I regret to say that I can neither transcribe nor translate the rolling periods in which my brother-in-law addressed himself to her. I have reason to believe that he apostrophised her as " O worthy woman of cows ! " invoking upon her and her household a comprehensive and classic blessing, dating from the time of Cuchulain.

Mrs. Brickley received it without a perceptible stagger, and in the course of the next few minutes, Miss Bridget Brickley (who, it may be remembered, had but recently renounced the office of kitchen-maid in my house) emerged, beautifully dressed, from the cottage, and was despatched, at full speed, to summon Shemus Ruadth, the poet, as well as one or two of " the neighbours " reputed to speak Irish of the purest kind. If to make a guest feel himself to be the one person in the world whose welfare is of

any importance is the aim of hostesses, they can study the art in its perfection under the smoky rafters of Irish cabins. If it is insincere, it is equally to be respected; it is often amiable to be insincere.

My own share of the day's enjoyment opened plausibly enough, though not, possibly, as cloudlessly as Maxwell's. Attended by Maria, Peter Cadogan, and the Widower, and by a smell of whisky that floated to me on the chill breeze when the Widower was to windward, I set forth, having—as I fatuously imagined—disposed of Minx and of her intention to join the shooting-party, by tying a stout piece of cord to her collar, and placing its other end in my brother-in-law's hand. I had, by Flurry's advice, postponed the shooting of the lake till the last thing before leaving the island, and turning my back upon it, I tramped inland along half-thawed marshes in search of snipe, and crept behind walls after plover, whose elusive whistling was always two fields ahead. After an unfruitful hour or so the entertainment began to drag, and another plan of campaign seemed advisable: I made a *cache* of my retinue behind a rock, one of the many rocks that stood like fossilised mammoths upon the ragged hill slopes, and, with Maria at my heels, accomplished a long and laborious détour. At length, through the crannies of a wall, I perceived, just within shot, a stand of plover, hopping, gobbling, squealing, quite unaware of my proximity. I cautiously laid

my gun on the top of the wall. As I cocked it, a white form appeared on a fence behind the birds, poised itself for an instant with elf-like ears spread wide, then, volleying barks, the intolerable Minx burst like a firework into the heart of the plover. In lightning response to her comrade's tally-ho Maria rocketed over the wall; the plover rose as one man, and, as I missed with both barrels, swirled out of range and sight. By way, I suppose, of rounding off the jest effectively, Maria rushed in scientific zigzags through the field, in search of the bird that she well knew I had not shot, deaf as the dead to words of command; while Minx, stark mad with excitement, circled and shrieked round Maria. To take off Maria's collar and thrash her heavily with the buckle end of it was futile, except as a personal gratification, but I did it. To thrash Minx was not only absurd but impossible; one might as well have tried to thrash a grasshopper.

I whistled for Peter and the Widower without avail, and finally, in just indignation, went back to look for them. They were gone. Not a soul was in sight. I concluded that they had gone on towards the lake, and having sacrificed a sandwich to the capture of Minx I coupled her to Maria by means of the cord that still trailed from her collar, and again set forth. The island was a large one, three or four miles long by nearly as many wide; I had opened my campaign along its western shores,

where heather struggled with bog, and stones, big and little, bestrewed any patch sound enough to carry them. Here and there were places where turf had been cut for fuel, leaving a drop like a sunk fence with black water at its foot, a matter requiring a hearty jump on to what might or might not be sound landing. When two maniacs are unequally yoked together by their necks, heartiness and activity are of less importance than unanimity, and it was in unanimity that Maria and Minx chiefly failed. At such moments, profoundly as I detested Minx, my sympathies reluctantly were hers. Conscious, as are all little dogs, of her superior astuteness, she yet had to submit to Maria's choice of pace, to Maria's professional quarterings and questings of obviously barren tracts of bogland. In bursts of squealing fury she hung from Maria's ear, she tore mouthfuls of brown wool from her neck, she jibbed with all her claws stuck into the ground; none the less she was swept across the ditches, and lugged over the walls, in seeming oneness of purpose, in total and preposterous absurdity. At one juncture a snipe, who must, I think, have been deaf, remained long enough within their sphere of action for me to shoot him. The couple, unanimous for once, charged down upon the remains; the corpse was secured by Maria, but was torn piecemeal from her jaws by Minx. They then galloped emulously back to me for applause, still

bitterly contesting every inch of the snipe, and, having grudgingly relinquished the fragments, waited wild-eyed and panting, with tongues hanging like aprons to their knees.

It was towards the close of the incident that I was aware of a sibilant whispering near me, and found that I was being observed from the rear, with almost passionate interest, by two little girls and a pair of goats. I addressed the party with an inquiry as to whether they had seen Jer Keohane.

The biggest little girl said that she had not seen him, but, in a *non sequitur* full of intelligence, added that she had seen Peter Cadogan a while ago, sitting down under a wall, himself and Pidge.

"What's Pidge?" said I cautiously. "Is it a dog?"

"Oh Christians!" said the smaller child, swiftly covering her mouth with her pinafore.

The elder, with an untrammelled grin, explained that "Pidge" was the name by which my late kitchenmaid was known in the home circle.

I postponed comment till Peter should be delivered into my hand, then, rightly concluding that the tendance of Hare Island goats would ensure the qualities necessary for dealing with even Maria and Minx, I engaged the pair as dog-boys.

My progress from this point to the lake might have been taken from the Old Testament, or the Swiss Family Robinson. In front of me paced

the goats, who had sociably declined to be left out of the expedition; behind me strove the dogs, with the wiry and scarlet fingers of their attendants knotted in Mrs. Brickley's invaluable piece of string. It proved to be a thoroughly successful working arrangement; I even shot a plover, which was retrieved *en masse* by all except the goats.

In complete amity we reached the lake, a reedy strip of water that twisted in and out between low hills, its indeterminate shores cloaked with reeds. It was now past three o'clock, and the cold grey afternoon was already heaping into the west the pile of dark clouds that was to be its equivalent for sunset. I crept warily forward round the flank of the nearest hill, leaving the dogs and their keepers in death grapple, and the goats snatching mouthfuls of grass beside them, in the petulant, fractious manner of goats, that so ill assorts with their Presbyterian grey beards.

The frost had been preceded by a flood, and the swamp bordering the lake was very bad going; the tussocks were rotten, the holes were delusively covered with lids of white ice, and to traverse these in the attitude of a man with acute lumbago was no light matter. But the ducks were there. I could hear them quacking and splashing beyond the screen of reeds, and, straightening my back for an observation, caught sight of four or five swimming in a line, well within range. There was

not an instant to lose; balancing precariously on a tussock, I flung up my gun and fired. Terrific quacking followed, interspersed by distant and heart-rending yells from the dogs, but the inexplicable feature of the case was that the ducks did not rise from the water. Had I slain the whole crowd? There was a sound as if the marsh behind me was being slashed with a flail; a brown body whizzed past me, closely followed by a white one. "From his mountain home King James had rushing come," in other words, my retrievers had hurled themselves upon their prey.

Maria's performance was faultless; in half a minute she had laid a bird at my feet, a very large pale drake, quite unlike any wild drake that I had ever——

Out of the silence that followed came a thin, shrill voice from the hill:

"Thim's Mrs. Brickley's ducks!"

In confirmation of this appalling statement I perceived the survivors already landing on the far side of the lake, and hurrying homeward up the hill with direful clamours, while a wedge-shaped ripple in the grey water with a white speck at its apex, told of Minx in an ecstasy of pursuit.

"Stop the dog!" I shouted to my maids-of-honour, "run round and catch her!"

Maria here, in irrepressible appropriation of the mission, bolted between my legs, and sent me staggering backwards into a very considerable boghole.

I will not labour the details. After some flounderings I achieved safety and the awe-stricken comments of the maids-of-honour, as wet as I have ever been in my life, and about five times as cold. One of my young ladies captured Minx in the act of getting ashore; the other collected the slaughtered drake and shrouded him in her pinafore, with a grasp of the position that did credit to both heart and head, and they finally informed me that Mrs. Brickley's house was only a small pieceen away.

I had left Mrs. Brickley's house a well-equipped sportsman, creditably escorted by Peter Cadogan and the Widower. I returned to it a muddy and dripping outcast, attended by two little girls, two goats, and her own eight ducks, whom my hand had widowed. My sodden clothes clung clammily about me; the wind, as it pierced them, carried with it all the iciness of the boghole. I walked at top speed to get up some semblance of a circulation; I should have run were it not for the confusion that such a proceeding would have caused to my cortège. As it was, the ducks fled before me in waddling panic, with occasional help from their wings, and panting and pattering in the rear told that the maids-of-honour, the goats, and the dogs were maintaining with difficulty their due places in the procession. As I neared the cottage I saw a boy go quickly into it and shut the door; I passed into the yard within the fuchsia hedge and heard

some one inside howling and droning a song in Irish, and as I knocked, with frozen knuckles, the house gave the indefinable feeling of being full of people. There was no response ; I lifted the latch. The door opened into the frieze-covered backs of several men, and an evenly blended smell of whisky, turf smoke, and crowded humanity steamed forth.

The company made way for me, awkwardly ; I noticed a tendency amongst them to hold on to each other, and there was a hilarious light in Mrs. Brickley's eye as she hustled forward to meet me. My brother-in-law was sitting at a table by the window writing in a notebook by the last light of the waning day ; he gave me a glance laden with affairs to which I was superfluous. A red-eyed, red-headed man, evidently the singer, was standing in the middle of the room ; it must have been in conformity with some irresistible law of nature that his hair stood out round his head in the orthodox poetic aureole.

In spite of the painful publicity of the moment there was but one course open to me. I tendered to my hostess the corpse of the drake, with abject apologies and explanations. To say that Mrs. Brickley accepted them favourably is quite inadequate. She heaped insults upon the drake, for his age, for his ugliness, for his temerity in getting in my way ; she, in fact, accepted his slaughter in the light of a personal favour and an excellent jest

combined, and passed rapidly on to explain that the company consisted of a few of the neighbours that was gathered to talk to the gentleman, and to be singing "them owld songs" for him; their number and their zeal being entirely due to the deep personal regard entertained for me by Hare Island. She further mentioned that it was Shrove Tuesday, and that people should "jolly themselves" before Lent. I was hurriedly conveyed to what is known as "Back in the room," a blend of best parlour and bedroom, with an immense bed in the corner. A fire was lighted, by the simple method of importing most of the kitchen fire, bodily, in a bucket, and placing it on the hearth, and I was conjured to "sthrip" and to put on a new suit of clothes belonging to my host while my own were being dried. He himself valeted me, inaugurating the ceremony with a tumbler of hot whisky and water. The suit of new clothes was of the thickest blue cloth, stiff as boards, and they smelt horribly of stale turf smoke. The discovery that the trousers consisted of but a leg and a half was startling; I had forgotten this aspect of the case, but now, in the proprietor's presence, it was impossible to withdraw from the loan. I could, at all events, remain *perdu*. Through all these preparations I was aware of highly incensed and fruitless callings for "Pidge"; of Peter Cadogan no tidings were forthcoming, and although a con-

ventional sense of honour withheld me from disclosing the information I might have given about the young lady, it did not deter me from mentally preparing a warm reception for her squire.

I sat by the fire in regal seclusion, with my clothes steaming on a chair opposite to me, and the strong glow of the red turf scorching the shin that was unprotected. Maria and Minx, also steaming, sat in exquisite serenity in front of the blaze, retiring every now and then to fling themselves, panting, on a cold space of floor. The hot whisky and water sent its vulgar and entirely acceptable consolations into the frozen recesses of my being, a feeling of sociability stole upon me; I felt magnanimously pleased at the thought that Maxwell, at least, had had a perfectly successful day; I glowed with gratitude towards Con Brickley and his wife.

Judged by the usual test of hostesses, that is to say, noise, the *conversazione* in Maxwell's honour was a high success. Gabble and hum, harangue and argument, and, through all, Maxwell's unemotional educated voice in discussion with the poet. Scraps of English here and there presently told me that the talk had centred itself upon the tragedy of the drake. I had the gratification of hearing Mrs. Brickley inform her friends that "if that owld dhrake was shot, itself, he was in the want of it, and divil mend him, going parading there till he had the Major put asthray! Sure that's the gintle-

man that's like a child! and Pidge could tell ye the same."

"Faith and thrue for ye," said another apologist, also female, "and ye wouldn't blame him if he didn't leave duck nor dhrake livin' afther him, with the annoyance he got from thim that should be tinding him, and he bloated with the walk and all!"

(I may, in my own interest, explain that this unattractive description merely implied that I was heated from excessive exercise.)

"And as for the same Pidge," broke in Mrs. Brickley with sudden fire, "when I ketch her it isn't to bate her I'll go, no! but to dhrag her by the hair o' the head round the kitchen."

These agreeable anticipations were interrupted by other voices. Some one named Paddy was called upon to sing the song about Ned Flaherty's drake.

"Sing up, Paddy boy, for the gentleman! Arrah, what ails ye, Paddy! Don't be ashamed at all!"

"'Tis a lovely song, your honour, sir!" (this to my brother-in-law).

"Is it an ancient song?" I heard Maxwell inquire with serious eagerness.

"It is, your honour; 'twas himself made it up lasht year, and he sings it beautiful! Oh! Paddy's a perfect modulator!"

With curiosity stimulated by this mysterious encomium I rose softly and half opened the door in order to obtain a view of the Modulator. A

lamp with a glaring tin reflector was on the table beside Maxwell; it illumined Paddy, the Modulator, an incredibly freckled youth, standing in front of my brother-in-law, with eyes fixed on the ground and arms hanging limply at his sides, like a prisoner awaiting sentence. It illumined also the artistic contempt on the elder Poet's countenance, and further revealed to me the fact that from twenty-five to thirty men and women were packed into the small kitchen.

The Modulator opened with a long-drawn and nasal cadenza, suggestive of the droning preliminary canter of a bagpipe, which merged into the statement that

> "The poor little fella',
> His legs they were yella',
> His bosom was blue, he could swim like a hake;
> But some wicked savage,
> To grease his white cabbage,
> Murdered Ned Flaherty's beautiful dhrake!"

Riotous applause followed on this startlingly appropriate requiem. Maxwell coldly laid down his stylograph with the manner of a reporter during an unimportant speech; the Poet took a clay pipe out of his pocket and examined its contents with an air of detachment; Paddy, with a countenance of undiminished gloom, prepared the way for the next verse with some half-dozen jig-steps, ending with a sledge-hammer stamp on the earthen floor. Fresh thunders of approval greeted the effort. It

seemed to me that Con Brickley's hospitality had been a trifle excessive; I even meditated a hint to that effect, but neither my host nor my hostess was visible. They were apparently holding an overflow meeting in a room at the other end of the house, and I noticed that although there was a steady flow of passers in and out between it and the kitchen, the door was carefully closed after each opening.

Suddenly the lamp on Maxwell's table flared up smokily as the door of the house was burst open. The second verse of the drake's elegy ceased at its first line. A woman whom I recognised as Kate Keohane, sister of the Widower, drove her way into the kitchen, sweeping back the people on either side of her with her arms, as though she were swimming. Her face was scarlet.

"Is Jer Keohane within here?" she shouted.

"He is not!" replied several voices.

Instantly the door of the inner room flew open, and like a stag (or a tom-cat, either simile would serve) answering the challenge of a rival, Mrs. Brickley came forth.

"Is it yer brother you're wantin', ma'am?" she said with lofty politeness. "Ye can search out the house for him if ye like. It's little he troubles my house or myself now, thanks be to God, and to the Magistrates that took my part before all that was in the Coort-house! Me that he had

goin' in dhread o' me life, with him afther me always in me thrack like a lap-dog ! "

" And who has him enticed now but your own daughther ? " shrieked Miss Keohane with lightning rapidity. " Isn't Ellen, the Chapel-woman, afther tellin' me she seen herself and himself shneakin' down behindside the chapel, like they'd be goin' aisht to the far sthrand, and she dhressed out, and the coat she stole from Mrs. Yeates on her and a bundle in her hand ! Sure doesn't the world know she has her passage paid to Ameriky this two months ! "

" Ye lie ! " panted Mrs. Brickley, catching her antagonist by the arm, not in attack, but in the awful truce of mutual panic.

Miss Keohane flung her off, only the better to gather force for the prolonged and direful howl of which she delivered herself.

" If she didn't come here with him it's to Ameriky she's taken him ! Look in yer box an' ye'll see where she got the passage money ! She has the boat's share taken from ye in spite of yer teeth ! " Miss Keohane here dropped upon her knees. " An' I pray," she continued, lyrically, " that the divil may melt her, the same as ye'd melt the froth off porther——"

Groans, hoots, and drunken laughter overwhelmed the close of this aspiration. Oblivious of my costume, I stepped forward, with the intention of attracting Maxwell's attention, and withdrawing

him and myself as swiftly and unobtrusively as possible from a position that threatened to become too hot to hold us.

Even as I did so, I saw in the dark blue space of the open door a face that was strangely familiar, a face at once civilised and martial, whose gaze was set incredulously upon me.

"Here's the Polis!" squeaked a little girl.

The Poet blew out the lamp. The house was in an instant full of the voiceless and strenuous shoving and trampling of people trying to escape. I heard the table go over with a crash, and could only suppose that Maxwell had gone with it, and Maria and Minx, convinced that a cat-hunt was at the root of the matter, barked deafeningly and unceasingly.

In a blinding flash of insight I realised that my brother-in-law and I had been taken red-handed in a "Shebeen," that is to say, a house in which drink is illicitly sold without a license.

The Police Sergeant was egregiously tactful. During the conversation that I held with him in the inner room he did not permit his eye to descend lower than the top button of Mr. Brickley's coat, a consideration that but served to make me more conscious of the humiliating deficiency below, nor did it deviate towards the empty tumbler, with the incriminating spoon in it, that stood on the table.

He explained to me and to Maxwell, whose presence I felt to be my sole link with respectability,

that the raid had been planned in consequence of information received after the trial.

"I was going to you, sir, to sign the warrant, but Mr. Knox and Dr. Hickey signed it for us. It was Mr. Knox advised us to come here to-day. We've found three half-barrels of porter under the bed in the room over there, and about two gallons of potheen hid under fishing nets. I'll have about thirty summonses out of it."

The Sergeant's manner was distressingly apologetic. I said nothing, but my heart burned within me as I recognised the hand of Flurry Knox.

"In case you might be looking for your man Cadogan, sir," went on the Sergeant, "we seen him in a boat, with two other parties, a man and a woman, going to the mainland when we were coming over. The man that was pulling the other oar had the appearance of having drink taken."

A second flash, less blinding than the first, but equally illuminative, revealed to me that the brown boots, the flannel suit, had been a wedding garment, the predetermined attire of the Best Man, and a third recalled the fact that Shrove Tuesday was the last day between this and Easter on which a marriage could take place.

Maxwell and I went back with the police, and Maxwell explained to me at some length the origin of the word shebeen. As I neared the mainland, which to-morrow would ring with Flurry's artistic

version of the day's events, the future held but one right spot, the thought of putting Peter Cadogan to fire and sword.

But even that was denied to me. It must have been at the identical moment that my cook, Mrs. Cadogan (aunt of the missing Peter), was placing her wedding ring in the Shrove Tuesday pancakes that evening, that my establishment was felled as one man by tidings that still remain preëminent among the sensations of Shreelane. They reached me, irrepressibly, with the coffee.

Hard on the heels of the flushed parlourmaid followed the flat and heavy tread of Mrs. Cadogan, who, like the avenging deities, was habitually shod with felt.

"And now, sir, what do ye say to Pether Cadogan!" she began, launching the enigma into space from the obscurity of the deep doorway. "What do ye say to him now? The raving scamp!"

I replied that I had a great deal to say to him, and that if I might so far trespass on his leisure as to request his presence in the hall, I would say it.

"Hall is it!" echoed Peter's aunt in bitter wrath. "It's my heart's grief that he ever stood in Shreelane hall to dhraw disgrace on me and on yer Honour! God forgive me, when I heard it I had to spit! Himself and Bridget Brickley got married in Skebawn this evenin', and the two o' them is gone to Ameriky on the thrain to-night,

and it's all I'll say for her, whatever sort of a thrash she is, she's good enough for him ! " There was a pause while one might pant twice.

" I'll tell ye no lie. If I had a gun in me hand, I'd shoot him like a bird ! I'd down the brat ! "

The avenging deity retired.

What part the Widower proposed to play in the day's proceedings will never be clearly known. He was picked up next day in Hare Island Sound, drifting seaward in the boat whose " share " had formed the marriage portion of Mrs. Peter Cadogan. Both oars were gone ; there remained to him an empty bottle of " potheen," and a bucket. He was rowing the boat with the bucket.

VIII

"A HORSE! A HORSE!"

PART I

"OLD Jimmy Porteous!" I ejaculated, while a glow of the ancient enthusiasm irradiated my bosom, "Philippa, I say! Do you see this? Jimmy Porteous is to command this District!"

"No, darling, *not* with an egg!" replied Philippa removing the honey spoon from the grasp of her youngest child, just too late to avert disaster, "we *don't* eat honey with eggs."

The heavy hand of experience has taught me that at moments such as these the only possible course is to lie to, head to wind, till the squall passes, and then begin from the beginning again. I re-addressed myself to my newspaper, while the incident went, like a successful burlesque, with a roar, sustained from the foot of the stairs to the point when the nursery door slammed upon it.

Philippa resumed her seat at the breakfast table.

"Yes, dear, what were you saying?" she said, yielding me the laborious but vague attention that

is the best any husband can expect from any wife on such occasions.

I repeated my statement, and was scandalised to find that Philippa had but the most shadowy remembrance of Jimmy Porteous, who in the days when I first joined my regiment had been its senior subaltern, and, for me and my fellows, one of the most revered of its law-givers. As a captain he left us, and proceeded to do something brilliant on somebody's staff, and, what time I got my company, had moved on in radiance into a lofty existence in the War Office and newspaper paragraphs.

I recalled these things to my wife, coupling them with the information that she would have to call on Lady Porteous, when the door opened, and the face of Flurry Knox, unshaven and blue, with the miserable mother-o'-pearl blueness of fair people in cold weather, appeared in the opening.

He had looked in, he said, on his way home from the fair, to try would we give him a cup of tea, and he went on to remark that the wind was cold enough to cut the horns off a cow.

I asked him if he had seen my beasts there, and if they had been sold.

" Oh, they were, they were," he said tolerantly ; " it was a wonderful good fair. The dealers were buying all before them. There was a man said to me, ' If you had a little dog there, and he to be a calf, you'd have sold him.' "

It was one of Flurry Knox's ruling principles in life to disparage the live stock of his friends; it was always within the bounds of possibility that the moment might arrive when he would wish to buy them.

"I met a man from Sir Thomas Purcell's country yesterday," said Flurry presently; "he says there's been the father and mother of a row down there between old Sir Thomas and Hackett, that's the man has the harriers. Sir Thomas is wild because they say the soldiers are giving Hackett as good a subscription as himself, and he says Hackett has all the foxes killed."

"But surely—harriers don't hunt foxes?" said Philippa ingenuously.

Flurry looked at her for a moment in silence. "Is it Hackett's harriers!" he said compassionately; "sure he flogs them off hares."

"Talking of soldiers, they've just sent a man who used to be in my regiment to command this district," I said, plucking my own topic from the tangle of inter-hunt squabbles; "a great man to hounds he used to be, too."

"Would he buy the Dodger?" asked Flurry swiftly. "Would he give a price?"

"I daresay he would if he liked the horse. If I got a chance I might tell him," I said, magnanimously.

"I tell you what, Major," said Flurry, with an

eye on his ally, Philippa, "you and me and Mrs. Yeates will go up and have a day with Sir Thomas's hounds, and you'll say the word for me to the General!"

Looking back at it all now, I recognise that here was the moment for firmness. I let the moment slip, and became immersed in tracking General Sir James Porteous, K.C.B., through the pages of an elderly Army List. By the time I had located him in three separate columns, I found that Philippa and Flurry had arranged unalterably the details of what my wife is pleased to call a ramp—*i.e.* an expedition that, as its name implies, suggests a raid made by tramps.

"—Why, my gracious! aren't they cousins of my own? They'll be only delighted! Sure, Sally had measles there three years ago, and 'twas as good as a play for them!—Put us up, is it? Of course they will! The whole lot of us. D'ye think Sally'd stay at home?—No, you'll not take your own horses at all. Hire from Flavin; I'll see he does you well."

"And you know, Sinclair"—thus the other conspirator—"it would be an excellent chance for you to meet your beloved Jimmy Porteous!"

It was not Mr. Knox's habit to let the grass grow under his feet. Before I had at all grasped the realities of the project, my wife heard from Mrs. Sally Knox to say that she had arranged it

all with the Butler-Knoxes, and that we were to stay on for a second night in order to go to a dance at which we should meet the General. At intervals during the following week I said to Philippa that it was preposterous and monstrous to dump ourselves upon the Butler-Knoxes, unknown people whom we had but once met at a function at the Bishop's. My remembrance of them, though something blurred by throngs of the clergy and their wives, did not suggest the type of person who might be expected to keep open house for stray fox-hunters. I said all this to Philippa, who entirely agreed with me, and continued her preparations, after the manner of experienced wives.

It was raining hard one afternoon in the following week when a four-wheeled inside car—an admirable vehicle, which I wish in no way to disparage—disgorged its burden at the door of Garden Mount House. One item of the burden was experiencing a sensation only too familiar, such a sensation as a respectable seaman might feel on being pressed into a crew of buccaneers. The house loomed over us, large, square, and serious, in the wet moonlight of the January evening; the husky, over-fed bark of an elderly dog was incessant in the hall. If by laying hold of the coat-tails of the leading pirate, as he got out to ring the bell, I could then and there have brought the expedition to a close, I would thankfully have done so.

The door was opened by a melancholy old gentleman with a grey moustache and whiskers; he might have been Colonel Newcome in his decadence, but from the fact that he wore an evening coat and grey trousers, I gathered that he was the butler, and for any one skilled in Irish households, he at once placed the establishment—rich, godly, low church, and consistently and contentedly dull. As we entered the hall there arose from some fastness in the house a shrill clamour that resolved itself into the first line of a hymn.

Flurry dug me in the ribs with his elbow. "They've found!" he whispered, "you needn't look so frightened. It's only Lucy and Louisa having the choir practice!"

To these strains Colonel Newcome ushered us into the drawing-room. There was no one in it. It was a large double drawing-room, and nothing but heavy maroon curtains now separated us from the choir practice. The hymn continued, a loud and long-drawn proclamation, and, pending its conclusion, my wife and Mrs. Flurry Knox swiftly and stealthily circumnavigated the room, and appraised all its contents, from a priceless Battersea basket filled with dusty bulbs, to a Chippendale card-table with a sewing machine clamped on to it, while Flurry, in a stage whisper, dilated to me upon the superfluous wealth that Providence had seen fit to waste upon the Butler-Knoxes. The

household, as I had gradually learnt, consisted of an elderly bachelor, Mr. Lucius Butler-Knox (commonly known as "Looshy"), his unmarried sister, Miss Louisa, his widowed sister, Mrs. Hodnett, and a corpulent, grey-muzzled black-and-tan terrier. Their occupations were gardening, and going to what they called "the city," *i.e.* the neighbouring county town, to attend charitable committee meetings; they kept a species of philanthropic registry office for servants; their foible was hospitality, disastrously coupled with the fact that they dined at half-past six. It was one of the mysteries of kinship that Flurry Knox and our host and hostess should possess a nearer relative in common than Adam. That he should have established their respectable home as his hostelry and house of call was one of the mysteries of Flurry Knox.

The hymn ceased, the raiders hastily formed into line, the maroon drapery parted, and the ladies of the house, flushed with song, and importing with them a potent sample of the atmosphere of the back drawing-room, were upon us, loud in hospitable apologies, instant in offers of tea; the situation opened and swallowed us up.

The half-past six o'clock dinner came all too swiftly. Glared upon by an unshaded lamp that sat like a ball of fire in the centre of the table, we laboured in the trough of a sea of the thickest

ox-tail soup; a large salmon followed; with the edge of dubious appetite already turned, we saw the succeeding items of the menu spread forth on the table like a dummy hand at bridge. The boiled turkey, with its satellite ham, the roast saddle of mutton, with its stable companion the stack of cutlets; the succeeding course, where a team of four wild duck struggled for the lead with an open tart and a sago pudding. Like Agag, we went delicately, and, like Agag, it availed us nothing.

I watched my *vis-à-vis*, little Mrs. Flurry, furtively burying a slab of turkey beneath mashed potatoes as neatly as a little dog buries a bone; her green kitten's eyes met mine without a change of expression, and turned to her glass, which Colonel Newcome had filled with claret. "The beaded bubbles, winking at the brim," had a greyish tinge.

"Cousin Lucius!" observed Mrs. Flurry, in a silence that presently happened to fall, "can you remember who painted that picture of our great-grandfather—the one over the door I mean?"

Mr. Butler-Knox, a small, grey-bearded, elderly gentleman, wholly, up to the present, immersed in carving, removed the steam of the ducks from his eye-glasses, and concentrated them upon the picture.

"It's by Maclise, isn't it?" went on Sally, leaning forward to get a nearer view.

In that moment, when all heads turned to the

picture, I plainly saw her draw the glass of claret to the verge of the table, it disappeared beneath it and returned to its place empty. Almost simultaneously, the black-and-tan terrier sprang from a lair near my feet, and hurried from the room, shaking his ears vigorously. Mrs. Flurry's eyes wavered from the portrait to mine, and her face became slowly and evenly pink, like an afterglow.

It was but one of the many shameless acts of my party during the age-long evening. At ten o'clock we retired to rest, for my own part, thoroughly overfed, not in the least sleepy, worn with conversation, and oppressed by the consciousness of flippant, even brutal, ingratitude.

The weather had cleared next morning to mild greyness, that softened even the asperity of half-past eight breakfast. I lumbered stiffly downstairs in a pair of new butcher boots, and found with thankfulness that our hosts, exhausted possibly by their efforts, had kept their rooms.

Marshalled in order upon the sideboard stood the remains of all the more enduring items of last night's dinner, cold indeed, but firm and undefeated; hot dishes of ancient silver roasted before the noble brass-mounted fireplace; there were vats of lethargic cream, a clutch of new-laid eggs, a heap of hot scones.

"It's easy seen it wasn't cracking blind nuts made Lucy Hodnett and Louisa the size they

are!" remarked Flurry, as the party, feeling more piratical than ever, embarked upon this collation. "Mrs. Yeates, do you think I am bound to dance with the pair of them to-night? *You* are, Major, anyway! But I might get off with Louisa."

"Oh, Sinclair's card is full," said my wife, who was engaged in trying to decipher the marks on the cream jug without upsetting the cream; "he and the General are plighted to one another for the evening."

"I wonder if the claret has stained the carpet!" said Mrs. Flurry, diving under the table. "It has! How awful!" Mrs. Flurry's voice indicated the highest enjoyment. "Never mind, they'll never see it! They're too fat to get under the table!"

"If they did, it'd be the first time old Looshy's claret ever put any one there!" said Flurry.

We have never known the precise moment in this speech at which "Old Looshy's" butler entered the room; we only know that while Mrs. Flurry, much hampered by habit and boots, was in the act of struggling from beneath the table, he was there, melancholy and righteous, with a telegram on a salver.

It was from Flavin, the livery stableman, and its effect upon the spirits of the company was that of a puncture in a tyre.

"Regret horses not available; am trying to procure others; will send by next train if possible."

We said that there was no answer, and we finished our breakfasts in a gravity scarcely lightened by Flurry's almost religious confidence in Flavin's infallibility, and in his power of making horses out of rushes, like the fairies, if need be.

I was, I may admit, from the first thoroughly pessimistic. I almost went up and got into ordinary clothes; I at least talked of doing so, as a means of preparing Philippa for the worst. I said it was a mere waste of time to send the Butler-Knox coachman to the station, as had been arranged, and I did my best to dissuade Flurry from his intention of riding to the meet by way of the station to help in unboxing animals that could not possibly be there.

In abysmal dejection my wife and I surveyed the departing forms of Mr. and Mrs. Florence Knox; the former on the Dodger, a leggy brown four-year-old, the planting of whom upon General Porteous had been the germ of the expedition; while Sally skipped and sidled upon a narrow, long-tailed chestnut mare, an undefeated jumper, and up to about as much weight as would go by parcel post for ninepence. There then ensued a period of total desolation, in which we looked morosely at old photograph books in the drawing-room, and faced the prospect of a long day with the Butler-Knoxes, while heavy footsteps overhead warned us that our entertainers were astir,

and that at any moment the day's conversation might begin.

I was engaged, not, I fancy, for the first time, in telling Philippa that I had always said that the entire expedition was a mistake, when Colonel Newcome again entered the room.

"The Master sent me to ask you, sir, if you'd like to have the pony-phaeton to drive down to the station to meet the half-past ten train. Flavin might be sending the horses on it, and it'd save you time to meet them there."

We closed with the offer; at its worst, the pony-carriage could be smoked in, which the drawing-room could not; at its best, it might save half an hour in getting to the meet. We presently seated ourselves in it, low down behind an obese piebald pony, with a pink nose, and a mane hogged to the height of its ears. As I took up the whip it turned and regarded us with an unblinkered eye, pink-lidded and small as a pig's.

"You should go through Fir Grove, sir," said the boy who had brought the equipage to the door, "it's half a mile of a short cut, and that's the way Tom will come with the horses. It's the first gate-lodge you'll meet on the road."

The mud was deep, and the piebald pony plodded through it at a sullen jog. The air was mild and chilly, like an uninteresting woman; the fore-knowledge of fiasco lay heavily upon us; it hardly

seemed worth while to beat the pony when he sank into a walk; it was the most heart-broken forlorn hope that ever took the field.

The gate-lodge of Fir Grove fulfilled the assignation made for it by the stable boy, and met us on the road. The gates stood wide open, and the pony turned in as by an accustomed route, and crawled through them with that simulation of complete exhaustion that is the gift of lazy ponies. Loud narrative in a male voice proceeded from the dark interior of the lodge, and, as we passed, a woman's voice said, in horrified rejoinder:

"The Lord save us! She must be Anti-Christ!"

Here, apparently, the speaker became aware of our proximity, and an old woman looked forth. Her face was apprehensive.

"Did ye see the police, sir?" she asked.

We replied in the negative.

"Please God, she'll not come our way!" she said, and banged the door.

We moved on, heavily, in the deep gravel of the avenue.

"Isn't this rather awful? Shall we go on?" said Philippa.

I replied with truth that there was no room to turn. On either side of the narrow drive laurels and rhododendrons were crammed as thickly as they could be planted, their dark foliage met overhead; if the inexpressible "She" referred to by the

lodge-keeper did come our way, retreat would be out of the question. The tunnel ran uphill, and I drove the pony up it as one drives a hoop, by incessant beating; had I relaxed my efforts he would probably, like a hoop, have lain down. Presently, and still uphill, we turned a corner, the tunnel ceased, and we were face to face with a large pink house.

As we advanced, feeling to the full the degradation of making a short-cut past a strange house, in tall hats and a grovelling pony-carriage, we beheld figures rushing past the windows of one of the rooms on the ground floor, as if in headlong flight. Was this the fulfilment of the dark sayings of the lodge-keeper, and was "She" "coming our way?" The bouncing strains of a measure, known, I believe, as "Whistling Rufus," came forth to us hilariously as we drew nearer. The problem changed, but I am not sure that the horror did not deepen.

Divining the determination of the piebald pony to die, if necessary, rather than pass a hall door without stopping at it, yet debarred by the decencies from thrashing him past the long line of windows, I administered two or three rousing tugs to his wooden mouth. At the third tug the near rein broke. The pony stopped dead. Simultaneously the hall door was flung open, and a young and lovely being, tall, and beautifully dressed, fluttered

out on to the steps and peered at us through long-handled eye-glasses.

"Oh! I thought you were the police!" exclaimed the being, with unaffected disappointment.

The position seemed, from all points, to demand an apology. I disengaged myself from the pony-carriage and proffered it; I also volunteered any help that a mere man, not a policeman, might be capable of rendering.

The young lady aimed her glasses at the piebald, motionless in sullen stupor, and replied irrelevantly:

"Why! That's the Knoxes' pony!"

I made haste to explain our disaster and the position generally, winding up with a request for a piece of string.

"You're staying at the Butler-Knoxes!" exclaimed the lady of the house. "How funny that is! Do you know you're coming to our dance to-night, to meet your old friend the General! I know all about it, you see!" She advanced with a beaming yet perturbed countenance upon Philippa, "I'm so glad to meet you. Do come in! We've got an infuriated cook at bay in the kitchen, and things are rather disorganised, but I think we can rise to a bit of string! The pony's all right—he'll sleep there for months, he always does."

We followed her into a hall choked with the exiled furniture of the drawing-room, and saw

through an open door the whirling forms of two or three couples of young men and maidens.

"They're polishing the floor," said our hostess, swiftly shutting the door, "they make a hideous noise, but it keeps them quiet—if you know what I mean. It's most disastrous that my husband has gone out hunting," she pursued; "this odious cook only arrived two days ago, and——"

At this juncture a door at the end of the hall burst open, disclosing a long passage and a young and crimson housemaid.

"She's coming, my lady! She's coming! Mr. Ralph's sent me on to get the door open!" she panted.

At the same moment a loud and wrathful voice arose in the passage and a massive form, filling it from wall to wall, appeared; the capitulating cook, moving down upon us with the leisurely and majestic truculence of a traction-engine. As she came she chanted these words in measured cadence:

"Lady Flora
Gets her brother
To do her dirty work."

By the time this rune had been repeated three times she was in the hall, shepherded by a tall young man, obviously the brother referred to, and by the butler, the vista being filled in the rear by a wavering assortment of female domestics. As the

cook tacked to weather a sofa, there was something about her that woke a vague and unpleasant chord of memory. Her ranging eye met mine, and the chord positively twanged as I recognised the formidable countenance of a female, technically known as a "job-cook," who for two cyclonic weeks had terrorised our household while Mrs. Cadogan was on leave. I backed convulsively into Lady Flora, in futile and belated attempt to take cover, but even as I did so the chanting ceased and I knew the worst had happened.

"Is that my darlin' Major Yeates?" shouted the cook, tacking again and bearing down on me full-sailed. "Thanks be to God I have the gentleman that'll see I get justice! And Mrs. Yeates, a noble lady, that'd never set foot in my kitchen without she'd ask my leave! Ah, ha! As Shakespeare says, I'd know a rale lady as soon as I'd put an eye on her, if she was boiling cabbage!"

She caught my reluctant hand and waved it up and down, and the muffled triumphings of "Whistling Rufus" in the drawing-room filled up the position.

Through them came a sound of wheels on the gravel, and through this again a strangled whisper from behind:

"Take her out to the steps; I hear the car with the police!"

Holding the fervid hand of the job-cook, I ad-

vanced with her through the furniture, skew-wise, as in the visiting figure of the Lancers; there was an undoubted effort on her part to keep time to the music, and she did not cease to inform the company that Major and Mrs. Yeates were the real old nobility, and that they would see she got her rights.

Followed closely by the shepherd and the butler, we moved forth on to the steps. The police were not there. There was nothing there save a complicated pattern of arcs and angles on the gravel, as of a four-wheeled vehicle that has taken an uncommonly short turn. At the bend of the avenue the pony-carriage, our link with the world without, was disappearing from view, the piebald pony heading for home at a pig-like but determined gallop. The job-cook clasped her hands on my arm and announced to the landscape that she would live and die with the Major.

IX

"A HORSE! A HORSE!"

PART II

A QUARTER of an hour later Philippa and I stood in the high road, with the sense of deliverance throbbing in every grateful nerve, and viewed the car, with the job-cook and the policeman, swing heavily away towards the railway station.

Mine was the strategy that had brought about our escape, mine were the attractions that had lured the cook to mount the policeman's car with me, and still more inalienably mine was the searing moment when, still arm-in-arm with the cook, we drove away from the deeply appreciative party on the doorsteps. Philippa and a policeman were on the opposite side of the car; the second policeman, very considerately, walked.

We were close to the station, the cook had sung herself to sleep, and Philippa and I had relapsed into the depths of abysmal despondency, when our incredulous eyes beheld the Butler-Knoxes' coachman coming towards us at a trot, riding a bay

horse and leading a grey, on which was a side-saddle. Flavin, the horse dealer, had, after all, been as good as Flurry's word—the hirelings were here, and all was right with the world.

The car slackened to a walk, we slid from it silently, and it and its burden passed into that place of shadows to which all extraneous affairs of life betake themselves on a hunting morning, when the hour is come, and the horse.

Looshy's coachman delivered to me the bay horse, a large and notable-looking animal, with a Roman nose adorned with a crooked blaze, a tranquil eye, and two white stockings. In his left hand he held a compact iron-grey mare, hogged and docked, who came up to the bank by the roadside, to be mounted, as neatly as a man-o'-war boat comes alongside. Hirelings of so superior a class it had never before been my privilege to meet, and I made up my mind that they were either incurably vicious or broken-winded.

"It's easy known that this mare's carried a lady before, sir," said the coachman, a young man with a soul for higher things than driving the Butler-Knox covered car, "and the big horse is the best I ever seen come out of Flavin's! He's in grand condition, he's as slick as a mouse! Only for Mr. Flurry being there we'd hardly have got them," he continued, while he lengthened my stirrup-leathers, "the chap Flavin sent with them

had drink taken, and the porters had the box shunted and himself in it, stretched, and the bottle of whisky with him!"

Flavin's man and his bottle of whisky were now negligible incidents for me. Philippa was already under way, and the time was short. The bay horse, arching his neck and reaching pleasantly at his bit, went away at a rhythmic and easy trot, the grey mare flitted beside him with equal precision; it was, perhaps, rather fast for riding to a meet, but we were late, and were they not hirelings?

We followed our guides, the telegraph posts, for some four miles of level road; they dropped down a deepening valley to a grey and brimming river, and presently came slate roofs and whitewashed houses, staring at each other across an empty village street. We had arrived at Kilbarron, the scene of the meet, and the meet was not.

"They've gone on! they've gone on!" screamed an old woman from a doorway, "away up over the hill!"

Evidently every other live thing had followed the hunt, and we did not spare Mr. Flavin's horses in doing the same. We reached the top of the long hill in a remarkably brief space of time, and, having done so, realised that we were not too late. A couple of fields away a row of figures, standing like palings along the top of a bank, with their backs to us, told that the hounds were still in view; even

as we sighted them, the palings plunged *en masse* from their standpoint with that composite yell that in Ireland denotes the breaking (and frequently the heading) of a fox, and vanished. Whatever was happening, it was not coming our way. I turned my hireling at the bank by the roadside, he came round with a responsive swing, and in two large and orderly bounds he was over. Before I had time to look round, the grey mare, with the faintest hint of a buck, galloped emulously past me.

" Perfection ! " panted Philippa, putting her hat straight.

As we came up on to the next bank, recently vacated by its human palisade, we found that fortune had smiled upon us. Just below, on our right, was a long strip of gorse covert ; three big fields beyond it, gliding from us like a flock of seagulls, were the clamouring hounds, and in the space between us and them bucketed the hunt, in the first fine frenzy of getting away. Flavin's bay immediately caught hold, not implacably, but with the firmness of superior knowledge ; the grey mare, having ascertained that Philippa was not going to interfere, thought better of going on alone, and took the time from her stable companion. The field was already sorting itself into the usual divisions of the forward, the cunning, and the useless ; our luck stood to us ; the forward division, carried away by the enthusiasm of a good start and a sympathetic

fall of ground, succeeded in less than a quarter of a mile in hustling the hounds over the line, and brought about a check. We joined the rearguard, and worked our way towards the front, unobtrusively, because Sir Thomas Purcell's comments on the situation were circling like a stock-whip among the guilty, and were not sparing the innocent. At this moment we found Flurry Knox beside us.

"Sir Thomas is giving the soldiers their tea in a mug!" he said; "and they were in the want of it! How are those horses doing with you?" he went on, looking our steeds up and down. "They look up to your weights, anyhow! I suppose you didn't see your friend, the General? He was at the meet in a motor."

"In a motor!" repeated Philippa. "I thought he was such a wonderful rider."

"He knows how to get a motor along, anyhow," replied Flurry, his attentive eyes following the operations of the hounds; "maybe he has the gout. You'd say he had by the colour of his face. Hullo! Boys! They're away again! Come on, Mrs. Yeates! Knock your two guineas' worth out of Flavin!"

Short as it was, the burst had been long enough to tranquillise my anxieties as to our hirelings' wind, and when we started again we found them almost excessively ready for the stone-faced bank that confronted us at the end of the field. Some

twenty of us, including the chidden, but wholly unabashed soldiers, went at it in line, and, after the manner of stone-faced banks, it grew very tall as we approached it. Flavin's bay strode unfalteringly over it; it was as though he grasped it and flung it behind him. The grey mare, full of jealousy and vain-glory, had a hard try to fly the whole thing, but retained sufficient self-control to change feet at the last possible instant; with or without a scramble or a peck, we all arrived somehow in the next field, and saw, topping the succeeding fence, the bulky chestnut quarters of Sir Thomas Purcell's horse and the square scarlet back of Sir Thomas. Away to the left, on an assortment of astute crocks, three of the Misses Purcell followed the First Whip, at as considerable a distance from their parent as was consistent with a good place. Their voices came confusedly to us; apparently each was telling the others to get out of her way.

For a quarter of an hour the hounds ran hard over the clean pasture-land, whose curves rose before us and glided astern like the long rollers under an Atlantic liner. Innocent of rocks or pitfalls, unimpeachable as to surface, it was a page of fair print as compared with the black letter manuscript to which the country of Mr. Flurry Knox's hounds might be likened. Never before have I crossed fences as sound, as seductive, it was like jumping large and well-upholstered Chesterfield

sofas; Chesterfieldian also were the manners of Flavin's bay. I found myself in the magnificent position of giving a lead to Flurry and the Dodger, of giving several leads to the soldiery; once, when a wide and boggy stream occurred, the Misses Purcell and the crocks looked to me as their pioneer. The hustle and the hurry never relaxed; the hounds had fastened on the line and were running it as though it were a footpath; but for the check at the start, no fox could have held his lead for so long at such a pace, and whatever the pace, the tails of the horses of Sir Thomas and the First Whip never failed to disappear over the bank just ahead.

For me, in the unwonted glory of heading the desperadoes of the first flight life and the future were contained in the question of how much longer I could count on my hireling. I was just able to spare a hasty thought or two to Philippa and the grey, and I remember that it was after a heavy drop into a road that I noticed, with the just and impotent wrath of a husband, that her hair was beginning to come down.

It was just then that I first saw the motor. The fox had run the road for some little distance; we clattered and splashed along it, until an intimidating roar from Sir Thomas and the sight of his right arm in the air, brought us, bumping and tugging, to a standstill. The hounds were for a moment at fault, swarming, with their heads down, over

every inch of the road, and beyond them, about a hundred yards from us, was a resplendent scarlet motor, whose nearer approach was summarily interdicted by the First Whip. I am short-sighted, but I caught an impression of two elderly gentlemen, one of whom, wearing a white moustache and a tall hat, was responding warmly to the fulminations of Sir Thomas. If this were my ancient brother-in-arms, Jimmy Porteous, following hounds in a motor, times were indeed changed. I dismissed the possibility from my mind. Just then I caught sight of Flurry's face; it had in it the fearful joy of a schoolboy who has seen a squib put into the tail pocket of the schoolmaster, and awaits the result. Mrs. Flurry, in the heroic act of plucking a hairpin from her own unshaken golden-red plaits, and yielding it to Philippa, met his eye with a glance that was so expressionless as to amount to a danger signal.

At this moment the hounds jostled over the wall with a clatter of falling stones; they spread themselves in the field like the opening of a fan, they narrowed to the recovered line like the closing of one; Sir Thomas's chestnut hoisted himself and his fifteen-stone burden out of the road with the heave of an earthquake. The riders shoved after him, and we were swept again into the current of the hunt.

As we thundered away up the field threatening shouts from the checked motorists followed us;

apparently, after the manner of their kind, they had not a moment to spare, and the delay had annoyed them. The next fence arrived, and they, and all else, were forgotten.

There was a wood ahead of us, cresting a long upland, and for it the hounds were making, at a pace that brutally ignored the rise of ground, and the fact that in these higher levels the fields were smaller, and the fences had to be faced up a hill that momently grew steeper.

"Hold on, Mrs. Yeates, till I take down that pole for you!" Flurry's voice followed us up the hill, and there was that in it that told he was making heavy weather of it. He was leading the dripping Dodger, and I have seldom seen a redder face than his as he laboured past Philippa and dragged away the shaft of a cart that barred a gap. "Bad luck to this for a close country!" he puffed. "You're not off one fence before you're on top of the next!" Flavin's horses were certainly lathering pretty freely, but were otherwise making no remark on the situation, and neither of them had so far made a mistake of any kind. I saw the First Whip regard the bay with obvious respect, and turn with a confidential comment to the nearest Miss Purcell. It hall-marked my achievements.

Philippa and I were among the first into the wood; even Flurry had been left three fields behind, and the glory of our position radiated from us,

as we stood at the end of the main ride, sublimely surveying the arrival of the rest of the streaming hunt. Sir Thomas and the hounds had dived out of sight into the recesses of the wood; a period of inaction ensued, and for a few balmy minutes peace with honour was ours.

Balmy, however, as were the minutes, there crept into them an anxiety as to what the hounds were doing. A great and complete silence had fallen as far as they and Sir Thomas were concerned, and Philippa and I, conscious of our high estate as leaders of the hunt, melted away from the crowd to investigate matters. We followed a path that took us across the wood, and the deeper we went the deeper was the silence, and the more acute became our fears that we had been left behind. Sir Thomas had an evil reputation for slipping his field and getting away alone.

"There's the horn!" cried Philippa. "It's outside the wood! They *have* gone away. Hurry!"

We were squeezing along the farther edge of the covert, looking for a way out, and I, too, heard the note, faint, yet commanding. I hurried. That is to say, with my hat over my eyes, and my cheek laid against the bay's neck, I followed my wife up an alley that was barely wide enough for a woodcock.

On our left was an impassable hedge of small trees, crowning a heavy drop into the field outside the wood; our faces were rowelled by the

branches of young spruce firs. It was all very well for Philippa, riding nearly two hands lower than I, to twist her way in and out through them like a squirrel, but for me, on a 16.2 horse, resolved on following his stable companion through a key-hole if necessary, it was anything but well. My eyes were tightly shut, my arm was in front of them, and my eye-glass was hanging down my back, when I felt the bay stop.

"Here's a way out," said my wife's voice, apparently from the middle of a fir tree, "there's a sort of a cattle track here."

There followed a scramble and a slide, then Philippa's voice again, enjoining me to keep to the right.

She has since explained that she really meant the left, and that, in any case, I might have known that she always said right when she meant left; be that as it may, when the bay and I had committed ourselves to the steep descent—half water-course, half cattle track—I was smitten in the face by a holly branch. Before I had recovered from its impact, a stout beechen bough, that it had masked, met me violently across the waistcoat and held me in mid-air, as the gorilla is reputed to grasp and hold the traveller, while my horse moved firmly downward from beneath me. After a moment of suspense, mental and physical, I fell to earth, like the arrow in the song, I knew not where, and tobog-

ganed painfully down something steep and stony, with briars in it.

As I rose to my feet, the mellow note of the horn that had beguiled us from the wood again sounded; nearer now, and with a harsher cadence, and I perceived, at the farther end of the field in which I had arrived, a bullock, with his head over a gate, sending a long and lamentable bugle note to the companions from whom he had been separated. Simultaneously the hounds opened far back in the wood behind me, and I knew that the flood-tide of luck had turned against us.

Flavin's bay had not waited for me. He was already well away, going with head and tail high held, a gentleman at large, seeking for entertainment at a lively and irresponsible trot. Pursuing him, with more zeal than discretion, was Philippa on the grey mare; he broke into a canter, and I had the pleasure of seeing them both swing through a gateway and proceed at a round gallop across the next field. I followed them at the best imitation of the same pace that my boots permitted, and squelched through the mire of the gateway in time to see the bay horse jump a tall bank, and drop with a clatter into a road. At the same moment the drumming and hooting of a motor-car broke upon my ear, and three heads, one of them wearing a tall hat, slid at high speed along the line of the fence. At sight of this apparition the bay horse gave

a massive buck, and fled at full speed up a lane. To my surprise and gratification, the motor-car instantly stopped, and one of its occupants—the wearer of the tall hat—sprang out and gave chase to my horse.

My attention was here abruptly transferred to my wife, who, having followed the chase, whether by her own wish or that of the grey mare I have never been able to discover, was now combating the desire of the latter to jump the bank at the exact spot calculated to land them both in the lap of the motor-car. The dispute ended in a slanting and crab-like rush at a place twenty yards lower down, and it was then that the figure of our host, Mr. Lucius Butler-Knox, rose, amazingly, in the motor-car, making semaphore gestures of warning.

The mare jumped crookedly on to the bank, hung there for half a second, and launched herself into space, the launch being followed, appropriately, by a mighty splash. Neither she nor Philippa reappeared.

Throughout these events I had not ceased to run, and the next thing I can distinctly recall is scrambling, thoroughly blown, on to the fence, whence a moving scene presented itself to me. The grey mare and Philippa had, with singular ingenuity, selected between them the one place in the fence where disaster was inevitable; and I now beheld my wife prone in two feet of yellow

water, the overflow of a flooded ditch that had turned a hollow by the roadside into a sufficiently imposing pond. Mr. Butler-Knox and the chauffeur were already rendering all the assistance possible, short of wetting their feet, and were hauling her ashore; while the grey mare, recumbent in deeper water, surveyed the operation with composure, and made no attempt to move. When I joined the party —a process involving a wide circuit of the flood— Philippa had sunk, dripping, upon a heap of stones by the roadside, in laughter as inexplicable as it was unsuitable. There was, at all events, no need to ask if she were hurt.

"The most appalling thing that you ever knew in your life has happened!" she wailed, and instantly fell again into unseemly convulsions.

Whatever the jest might be, it did not appeal to the chauffeur, who withdrew in silence to his motor, coldly wiping the vicarious duckweed from his knees with a silk pocket-handkerchief. Still less did it appeal to me. Any fair-minded person will admit that I had cause to be excessively angry with Philippa. That a grown woman, the mother of two children, should mistake the bellow of a bullock for the note of a horn was bad enough; but that when, having caused a serious accident by not knowing her right hand from her left, and having, by further insanities, driven one valuable horse adrift into the country, probably broken the

back of another, laid the seeds of heart disease in her husband from shock and over-exertion, and of rheumatic fever in herself; when, I repeat, after all these outrages, she should sit in a soaking heap by the roadside, laughing like a maniac, I feel that the sympathy of the public will not be withheld from me.

The mystery of Mr. Butler-Knox's appearance in the motor-car passed by me like a feather in a whirlwind; I strode without a word into the yellow flood in which the mare was lying, and got hold of her reins with the handle of my crop; I might as well have tried to draw out Behemoth with a hook. Her hind-quarters were well fixed in the hidden ditch, she made not the slightest effort to stir, and continued to recline, contentedly, not to say defiantly.

"That's a great sign of fine weather," said a voice behind me in affable comment, "when a horse will lie down in wather that way."

I turned upon my consoler, and saw a young countryman with a fur-lined coat hanging upon his arm.

"I got this thrown in the bohireen above," he said, "the other gentleman, that's follying the bay horse, stripped it off him, and God knows it's itself that's weighty!"

"My dear Major!" began Looshy, addressing me agitatedly from the bank, as a hen might address

a refractory duckling, "there has been a most unfortunate mistake."

"There has! There has! It's all Flurry's fault!" gasped Philippa, staggering towards me like a drunken woman.

"I fear the General is terribly annoyed," continued Looshy, wiping his grey beard and mopping his collar to remove the muddy imprint of Philippa's arm; "he rushed into Garden Mount in search of his horses when he found they were not at the meet nor at the station—he left Lady Porteous with my sisters and took me to identify you; I mentioned your name, but he did not seem to grasp it—indeed his language was—er—was such that I thought it unwise to press the point."

I dropped the reins and began, slowly, to wade out of the pool.

"I understand he has but just paid £300 for these horses—it was an unpardonable mistake of Flurry's," went on Looshy, "he found the General's horses at the station and thought that they were Flavin's."

"Dear Flurry!" sobbed Philippa, shamelessly, reeling against me and clutching my arm.

"Begor' he have the horse!" said the young countryman, looking up the hill.

A stout figure in a red coat and tall hat was approaching by way of the bohireen, followed by a man leading a limping horse.

"I think," said Looshy nervously, "that Mrs. Yeates had better have my seat in the motor-car and hurry home. I will walk—I should really prefer it. The General will be quite happy now that he has found his horses and his old friend."

The chauffeur, plying a long-necked oil-can, smiled sardonically.

X

SHARPER THAN A FERRET'S TOOTH

"My dear Philippa," said Miss Shute gloomily, "I have about as much chance of spending next winter in Florence as I have of spending it in the moon. I despair of ever getting Bernard married. I look upon him as hopeless."

"I don't agree with you at all," replied Philippa, "don't you remember how demented he was about Sally Knox? And when we all thought he was on the verge of suicide, we discovered that he was deep in a flirtation with that American girl. It seems to me he's ready to be devoted to any one who takes him in hand. He has none of that deadly helpless fidelity about him."

"I ought never to have allowed him to take up gardening," said Miss Shute, despondently pursuing her own line of thought, "it only promotes intimacies with dowagers."

"Yes, and it makes men elderly, and contented, and stay-at-home," agreed Philippa; "it's one of the worst signs! But I can easily make Sybil Hervey think she's a gardener. She's a thoroughly

nice, coercible girl. Alice has always been so particular about her girls. Of course with their money they've been run after a good deal, but they're not in the least spoilt."

"I don't think," I murmured privately to Maria, who was trying to hypnotise me into letting her crawl on to the sofa beside me, "that we'll borrow half-a-crown to get drunk with her."

Maria wagged her tail in servile acquiescence.

"Nonsense!" said my wife largely.

A month from the date of this conversation, Sybil Hervey, my wife's pretty, young, and well-dowered niece, was staying beneath our roof. I had not changed my mind about the half-crown, though Maria, perfidious as ever, feigned for her the impassioned affection that had so often imposed upon the guileless guest within my gates.

"Why, this dog has taken the most extraordinary fancy to me!" Sybil Hervey (who was really a very amiable girl) would say, and Maria, with a furtive eye upon her owners, would softly draw the guest's third piece of cake into the brown velvet bag that she called her mouth.

This was all very well from Maria's point of view, but a friendship with Maria had not been the object of Miss Hervey's importation. I evade, by main strength, the quotation from Burns proper to this state of affairs, and proceed to say that the matrimonial scheme laid by my wife and Miss Shute was

not prospering. Sybil Hervey, the coercible, the thoroughly nice, shied persistently at the instructive pages of Robinson's "English Flower Garden," and stuck in her toes and refused point blank to weed seedlings for her Aunt Philippa. Nor was a comprehensive garden party at Clountiss attended with any success; far otherwise. Miss Shute unfortunately thought it incumbent on her to trawl in deep waters, and to invite even the McRory family to her entertainment, with the result that her brother, Bernard—I quote my wife verbatim—made a ridiculous spectacle of himself by walking about all the afternoon with a fluffy-haired, certainly-rather-pretty, little abomination, a creature who was staying with the McRorys. Worse even than this, Sybil had disappointed, if not disgraced, her backers, by vanishing from the ken of un-gentle men with Mr. De Lacy McRory, known to his friends as "Curly."

I have before now dealt, superficially, and quite inadequately, with the McRorys. It may even be permitted to me to recall again the generic description of each young male McRory. "A bit of a lad, but nothing at all to the next youngest." Since that time the family had worn its way, unequally and in patches, into the tolerance of the neighbourhood. It was said, apologetically, that the daughters danced, and played tennis and golf so well, and the sons did the same and were such excellent shots,

and that Mrs. McRory bought, uncomplainingly, all that was offered to her at bazaars, and could always be counted on for a whole row of seats at local concerts. As for old McRory, people said that he was certainly rather awful, but that he was better than his family in that he knew that he was awful, and kept out of the way. As a matter of history, there were not many functions where a McRory of some kind, in accordance with its special accomplishment, did not find, at all events, standing room; fewer still where they did not form a valued topic of conversation.

Curly McRory was, perhaps, the pioneer of his family in their advance to cross what has been usefully called "the bounder-y line." He played all games well, and he was indisputably good-looking, he knew how to be discreetly silent; he also, apparently, knew how to talk to Sybil what time her accredited chaperon, oblivious of her position, played two engrossing sets of tennis.

After this fiasco came a period of stagnation, during which Mr. De Lacy McRory honoured us with his first visit to Shreelane, bicycling over to see me, on business connected with the golf club; in my regretted absence he asked for Mrs. Yeates, and stayed for tea. Following upon this Sybil took to saying, "I will," in what she believed to be a brogue, instead of "yes," and was detected in fruitless search for the McRorys of Temple

Braney in the pages of Burke's Irish Landed Gentry.

It was at this unsatisfactory juncture that Mrs. Flurry Knox entered into the affair with an invitation to us to spend three days at Aussolas Castle, one of which was to be devoted to the destruction of a pack of grouse, fabled by John Kane, the keeper, to frequent a mountain back of Aussolas: the Shutes were also to be of the party. I seemed to detect in the arrangement a hand more diplomatic than that of Providence, but I said nothing.

The Flurry Knoxes were, for the moment, in residence at Aussolas, while old Mrs. Knox made her annual pilgrimage to Buxton. They were sent there to keep the servants from fighting, and because John Kane had said that there was no such enemies to pigs as servants on board wages. (A dark saying, bearing indirectly on the plenishing of pig-buckets.)

Between servants and pigs, as indeed in most affairs of life, little Mrs. Flurry held the scales of justice with a remarkably steady hand, and under her régime one could at all events be reasonably sure of having one's boots cleaned, and of getting a hot bath in the morning. We went to Aussolas, and Flurry and Bernard Shute and I put in a blazing September day on the mountain, wading knee deep in matted heather and furze, in pursuit of the mythical grouse, and brought home two

hares and a headache (the latter being my contribution to the bag). The ladies met us with tea; Sybil, in Harris tweed and admirable boots, looked, I must admit, uncommonly smart. Even Flurry was impressed, and it was palpable to the most superficial observer that Bernard was at length beginning, like a baby, to "take notice." After tea he and she moved away in sweet accord to wash teacups in a bog-hole, from whence their prattle came prosperously to the ears of the three diplomatists, seated, like the witches in Macbeth, upon the heath, and, like them, arranging futures for other people. Bearing in mind that one of the witches had (in a previous incarnation as Miss Sally Knox) held Bernard in her thrall, and still retained him in a platonic sphere of influence, any person of experience would have said that the odds were greatly against Mr. Shute.

The hot bath that was the *fine fleur* of Mrs. Flurry's régime at Aussolas failed conspicuously next morning. It was the precursor of a general slump. When, at a liberal 9.30, I arrived in the dining-room, of neither host, hostess, nor breakfast was there any sign. The host, it appeared, had gone to a fair; having waited for a hungry half-hour we were coming to the conclusion that the hostess had gone with him, when the door opened and Mrs. Flurry came swiftly into the room. Her face was as a book, where men might read strange

matters; it was also of a hue that suggested the ardent climate of the kitchen; in her hand she carried a toast-rack, and following hard on her heels came three maids, also heavily flushed, bearing various foods, and all, apparently, on the verge of tears. This cortège having retired, Mrs. Flurry proceeded to explain. The butler, Johnny, a dingy young man, once Mrs. Knox's bathchair-attendant, had departed at 8 A.M., accompanied by Michael, the pantry boy, to dig a grave for a cousin. To those acquainted with Aussolas there was nothing remarkable in this, but Sybil Hervey's china-blue eyes opened wide, and I heard her ask Bernard in a low voice if he thought it was anything agrarian. The annoyance of the cook at the defection of the butler and pantry boy was so acute that she had retired to her room and refused to send in breakfast.

"That was no more than I should have expected from the servants here," said Mrs. Flurry vindictively, "but what was just a little too much was finding the yard-boy cramming the toast into the toast-rack with his fingers."

At this my wife's niece uttered the loud yell which all young women with any pretension to smartness have by them for use on emergencies, and exclaimed—

"Oh, *don't!*"

"You needn't be frightened," said Mrs. Flurry, giving Miss Hervey the eighth part of a glance

of her greeny-grey eyes; "I made this stuff myself, and you may all think yourselves lucky to get anything," she went on, "as one of the herd of incapables downstairs said, 'to get as much milk as'd do the tea itself, that was the stratagem'!"

Hard on the heels of the quotation there came a rushing sound in the hall without, a furious grappling with the door-handle, and the cook herself, or rather the Tragic Muse in person, burst into the room. Her tawny hair hung loose about her head; her yellow-brown eyes blazed in an ashen and extremely handsome face; she shook a pair of freckled fists at the universe. I cannot pretend to do more than indicate the drift of her denunciation. Brunhilde, ascending the funeral pyre, with full orchestral accompaniment, could not more fully and deafeningly have held her audience, and the theme might have been taken out of the darkest corner of any of the Sagas.

The burying-ground of her clan was—so she had been informed by a swift runner—even now being broken into by the butler and the pantry boy, and the graves of her ancestors were being thrown open to the Four Winds of the World, to make room for the Scuff of the Country (whatever that might mean). Here followed the most capable and comprehensive cursings of the butler and the pantry boy that it has ever been my lot to admire, delivered at lightning speed, and with

gestures worthy of the highest traditions of classic drama, the whole ending with the statement that she was on her way to the graveyard now to drink their blood.

"I trust you will, Kate," cordially responded Mrs. Flurry, "don't wait a moment!"

The Tragic Muse, startled into an instant of silence, stared wildly at Mrs. Flurry, seemed to scent afar off the possibility that she was not being taken seriously, and whirled from the room, a Vampire on the warpath.

"I meant every word I said to her!" said Sally, looking round upon us defiantly, "I was very near offering her your motor, Mr. Shute! The sooner she kills Johnny and Michael the better pleased I shall be! And I may tell you all," she added, "that we shall have no luncheon to-day, and most probably no dinner!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Philippa, seeing her chance, and hammering in her wedge with all speed, "now there's nothing for it but sandwiches and a picnic!"

The lake at Aussolas was one of a winding chain of three, connected by narrow channels cut through the bog for the passage of boats that carried turf to the lake-side dwellers. The end one of these, known as Braney's Lake, was a recognised place for picnics; a ruined oratory on a wooded point supplying the pretext, and a reliable spring well

completing the equipment. The weather was of the variety specially associated in my mind with Philippa's picnics, brilliantly fine, with a falling glass, and 12 o'clock saw us shoving out from the Aussolas turf quay, through the reeds and the rocks.

We were a party of six, in two boats; diplomacy, whose I know not, had so disposed matters that Bernard Shute and Sybil Hervey were despatched together in a dapper punt, and I, realising to the full the insignificance of my position as a married man, found myself tugging at a tough and ponderous oar, in a species of barge, known to history as "The-Yallow-Boat-that-was-painted-black." My wife and Mrs. Flurry took turns in assisting my labours by paddling with a scull in the bow, while Miss Shute languidly pulled the wrong string at intervals, in the stern. Why, I grumbled contentiously, should, as it were, fish be made of Bernard and flesh be made of me (which was a highly figurative way of describing a performance that would take a stone off my weight ere all was done). Why, I repeated, should not Bernard put his broad back into it in the heavy boat with me, and leave the punt for the ladies? My wife tore herself from *sotto voce* gabblings with Sally in the bow to tell me that I was thoroughly unsympathetic, what time she dealt me an unintentional but none the less disabling blow in the spine, in her effort to fall again into stroke. Mrs. Flurry, in order to take turns

at the oar with Philippa, had seated herself on the luncheon basket in the bow, thereby sinking the old tub by the head, and, as we afterwards found, causing her to leak in the sun-dried upper seams. To us travelled the voice of Bernard, lightly propelling his skiff over the ruffled and sparkling blue water.

"He's telling her about all the alterations he's going to make at Clountiss!" hissed Sally down the back of Philippa's neck.

"Almost actionable!" responded my wife, and in her enthusiasm her oar again took me heavily between the shoulder blades.

We laboured out of the Aussolas lake, and poled down the narrow channel into the middle lake, where shallows, and a heavy summer's growth of reeds, did not facilitate our advance. The day began to cloud over; as we wobbled out of the second channel into Braney's lake the sun went in, a sharp shower began to whip the water, and simultaneously Miss Shute announced that her feet were wet, and that she thought the boat must be leaking. I then perceived that the water was up to the bottom boards, and was coming in faster than I could have wished. A baler was required, and I proceeded with confidence to search for the rusty mustard tin, or cracked jam-crock, that fills that office. There was nothing to be found.

"There are plenty of cups in the luncheon

basket," said Sally, tranquilly; "Flurry once had to bale this old boat out with one of his grandmother's galoshes."

Philippa and I began to row with some vigour, while Sally wrestled with the fastening of the luncheon basket in the bow. The lid opened with a jerk and a crack. There was one long and speechless moment, and then Sally said in a very gentle voice:

"They've sent the washing-basket, with all the clean clothes!"

Of the general bearings of this catastrophe there was no time to think; its most pressing feature was the fact that there were no cups with which to bale the boat. I looked over my shoulder and saw Bernard dragging the punt ashore under the ruined oratory, a quarter of a mile away; there was nothing for it but to turn and make for the shore on our right at the best pace attainable. Sally and Philippa double-banked the bow oar, and the old boat, leaking harder at each moment, wallowed on towards a landing stage that suddenly became visible amid the reeds—the bottom boards were by this time awash, and Miss Shute's complexion and that of her holland dress matched to a shade.

"Could you throw the washing overboard?" I suggested over my shoulder, labouring the while at my massy oar.

"My—new—nightgowns!" panted Mrs. Flurry, "never!"

Just then big rocks began to show yellow in the depths, the next moment the boat scraped over one, and, almost immediately afterwards, settled down quietly and with dignity in some three feet of brown water and mud.

Only those who have tried to get out of a submerged boat, can form any idea of what then befell. Our feet and legs turned to lead, the water to glue, all that was floatable in the boat rose to the surface, and lay about there impeding our every movement. We had foundered in sight of port and were not half-a-dozen yards from the landing stage, but to drag myself and three women, all up to our waists in water, and the ladies hopelessly handicapped by their petticoats, over the gunwale of a sunken boat, and to flounder ashore with them in mud, over unsteady rocks, and through the ever-hampering reeds, was infinitely more difficult and exhausting than it may seem.

Clasping a slimy post to my bosom with one arm, I was in the act of shoving Miss Shute up on to the landing stage, when I heard the unmistakable Dublin light tenor voice of a McRory hail me, announcing that he was coming to our rescue. More distant shouts and the rapid creaking of hard-pulled oars told that Bernard and Sybil were also speeding to our aid. The three diplomates, dripping

on the end of the pier, looked at each other bodefully, and Philippa murmured :

" The worst has happened ! "

After that the worst continued to happen, and at a pace that overbore all resistance. Mr. De Lacy McRory, tall and beautiful, in lily-white flannels, took the lead into his own hands and played his game faultlessly. Philippa was the object of his chief solicitude, Sally and Miss Shute had their share of a manly tenderness that resolutely ignored the degrading absurdity of their appearance ; his father's house, and all that was therein, was laid at our feet. Captive and helpless, we slopped and squelched beside him through the shrubberies of Temple Braney House, with the shower, now matured into a heavy downpour, completing our saturation, too spiritless to resent the heavy pleasantries of Bernard, the giggling condolences of Sybil.

We have never been able to decide at which moment the knife of humiliation cut deepest, whether it was when we stood and dripped on the steps, while Curly McRory summoned in trumpet tones his womenkind ; or when, still dripping, we stood in the hall and were presented to Mrs. McRory and a troop of young men and maidens, vociferous in sympathy and hospitality ; or when, having progressed like water carts through the house, we found ourselves installed, like the Plague of Frogs,

in the bedchambers of the McRorys, face to face with the supreme embarrassment of either going to bed, or of arraying ourselves in the all too gorgeous garments that were flung before us with a generous *abandon* worthy of Sir Walter Raleigh.

I chose the latter course, and, in process of time, found myself immaculately clothed in what is, I believe, known to tailors as " a Lounge Suit," though not for untold gold would I have lounged, or by any carelessness endangered the perfection of the creases of its dark grey trousers.

The luncheon gong sounded, and, like the leading gentleman in any drawing-room drama, I put forth from my dressing-room, and at the head of the stairs met my wife and Miss Shute. They were, if possible, grander than I, and looked as if they were going to a wedding.

" We had the choice of about eighty silk blouses," breathed Philippa, gathering up a long and silken train, " Sally has to wear Madame's clothes, nothing else were short enough. We're in for it, you know," she added, " a luncheon is inevitable, and goodness knows when we can get away, especially if this rain lasts—" her voice broke hysterically ; I turned and saw Mrs. Flurry shuffling towards us in velvet slippers, holding up with both hands a flowing purple brocade skirt. I pointed repressively downwards, to where, in the window seat of the hall below, were visible the crispéd golden curls of Mr.

De Lacy McRory, and the shining rolls and undulations of Miss Sybil Hervey's *chevelure*. Their heads were in close proximity, and their voices were low and confidential.

"This must be put a stop to!" said Philippa, rustling swiftly downstairs.

We all moved processionally in to lunch, arm in arm with the McRorys. To Philippa had fallen old McRory, who was the best of the party (in being so awful that he knew he was awful). He maintained an unbroken silence throughout the meal, but whistled jigs secretly through his teeth, a method of keeping up his courage of which I believe he was quite unconscious. Of the brilliance of the part that I played with Mrs. McRory it would ill become me to speak; what is more worthy of record is the rapid and Upas-like growth of intimacy between Curly McRory and my wife's niece. She had probably never before encountered a young man so anxious to be agreeable, so skilled in achieving that end. The fact that he was Irish accounted, no doubt in her eyes, for all that was unusual in his voice and manners, and his long eyelashes did the rest. Sybil grew momently pinker and prettier as the long, extraordinary meal marched on.

Of its component parts I can only remember that there was a soup tureen full of custard, a mountainous dish of trifle, in whose veins ran honey, instead of jam, and to whose enlivenment a bottle

at least of whisky had been dedicated; certainly, at one period, Philippa had on one side of her plate a cup of soup, and on the other a cup of tea. Cecilia Shute was perhaps the member of our party who took it all hardest. Pale and implacable, attired in a brilliant blue garment that was an outrage alike to her convictions and her complexion, she sat between two young McRorys, who understood no more of her language than she did of theirs, and was obliged to view with the frigid tranquillity boasted of by Doctor Johnson, the spectacle of her brother devoting himself enthusiastically to that McRory cousin whom Philippa had described as a fluffy-haired abomination. Everything, in fact, was occurring that was least desired by the ladies of my party, with the single exception of my niece by marriage; and the glowing satisfaction of the McRory family was not hid from us, and did not ameliorate the position.

When luncheon was at length brought to a close nothing could well have been blacker than the outlook. The rain, and the splendour of our borrowed plumes, put a return by boat out of the question. It was a good seven miles round by road, and the McRory family, fleet and tireless bicyclists, had but one horse, which was lame. A telegram to Aussolas had been despatched an hour ago, but as Mrs. Flurry was gloomily certain that every servant there had gone to the funeral, the time of our release was unknown.

I do not now distinctly remember what occurred immediately after lunch, but I know there came a period when I found myself alone in the hall, turning over the pages of a dreary comic paper, uncertain what to do, but determined on one point, that neither principalities nor powers should force me into the drawing-room, where sat the three unhappy women of my party, being entertained within an inch of their lives by Mrs. McRory. Sybil and Bernard and their boon companions had betaken themselves to that distant and dilapidated wing of the house in which I had once unearthed Tomsy Flood, there to play squash racquets in one of the empty rooms. I was consequently enacting the part laid down for me by my lounge suit; I was lounging, as a gentleman should, without for an instant disturbing the creases of my trousers.

At times I was aware of the silent and respectful surveillance of Mr. McRory in the inner hall, but I thought it best for us both to feign unconsciousness of his presence. Through a swing door that, true to its definition, swung wheezily to the cabbage-laden draughts from the lower regions, I could hear the tide of battle rolling through the disused wing. The squash racquets seemed to be of a most pervading character; the thunder of rushing feet, blent with the long, progressive shriek of an express train, would at intervals approach almost to the swing door, but I remained unmolested.

I had entered upon my second cigarette, and a period of comparative peace, when I heard a stealing foot, and found at my elbow a female McRory of about twelve as years go, but dowered with the accumulated experience of six elder sisters.

"Did Pinkie and Mr. Shute come in this way to hide?" she began, looking at me as if "Pinkie," whoever she might be, was in my pocket. "We're playing hide'n-go-seek, and we can't find them."

I said I knew nothing of them.

The McRory child looked at me with supernal intelligence from under the wing of dark hair that was tied over one ear.

"They're not playing fair anyhow, and there's Curly and Miss Hervey that wouldn't play at all!" She eyed me again. "He took her out to show her the ferrets and they never came back. I was watching them; she said one of the ferrets bit her finger, and Curly kissed it!"

"I suppose you mean he kissed the ferret," I said repressively, while I thought of Alice Hervey, mother of Sybil, and trembled.

"Ah, go on! what a fool you're letting on to be!" replied the McRory child, with elegant sarcasm. She swung round on her heel and sped away again upon the trail, cannoning against old McRory in the back hall.

"I tell you, that's the lady!" soliloquised old McRory, from the deep of the back hall. I gathered

that he was referring to the social capacity of his youngest daughter and thought he was probably right.

It was at this moment that deliverance broke like a sunburst upon us; I saw through the windows of the hall a dogcart and an outside car whirl past the door and onwards to the yard. The former was driven by Flurry Knox, the car by Michael the Aussolas pantry boy, apparently none the worse for his encounter with the vampire cook. I snatched an umbrella, and, regardless of the lounge suit, followed with all speed the golden path of the sunburst.

Flurry, clad in glistening yellow oilskins, met me in the yard, wearing an expression of ill-concealed exultation worthy of Job's comforters at their brightest.

"D'ye know who opened your wire?" he began, regarding me with an all-observant eye from under his sou-wester, while the rain-drops ran down his nose. "I can tell you there's the Old Gentleman to pay at Aussolas—or the old lady, and that's worse! That's a nice suit—you ought to buy that from Curly."

"Who opened my telegram?" I said. I was not at all amused.

"'When she got there, the cupboard was bare,'" returned Flurry. "Not a servant in the house, not a bit in the larder! If it wasn't that by the

mercy of providence I found the picnic basket that you bright boys had left after you, she'd have torn the house down ! "

" I suppose you mean that your grandmother has come back," I said stonily.

" She fought with her unfortunate devil of a doctor at Buxton," said Flurry, permitting himself a grin of remembrance ; " he told her she was too old to eat late dinner, and she told him she wasn't going to be a slave to her stomach or to him either, and she'd eat her dinner when she pleased, and she landed in at Aussolas by the mid-day train without a word."

" What did she say when she opened my telegram ? " I faltered.

" She said ' Thank God, I'm not a fool ! ' " replied her grandson.

The proposition was unanswerable, and I took it, so to speak, lying down.

" Here ! " said Flurry, summoning the pantry boy. " These horses must go in out of the rain. I'll look over there for some place I can put them."

" I see Michael got back from the funeral," I said, following Flurry across the wide and wet expanse of the yard, " I suppose the cook killed Johnny ? "

" Ah, not at all," said Flurry, " anyway, my grandmother had the two of them up unpacking

her trunks when I left. Here, this place looks like a stable——"

He opened a door, in front of which a cascade from a broken water-shoot was splashing noisily. The potent smell of ferrets greeted us.

Seated on the ferrets' box were Mr. De Lacy McRory, and Sybil, daughter of Alice Hervey. Apparently she had again been bitten by the ferret, but this time the bite was not on her finger.

XI

OWENEEN THE SPRAT

I WAS labouring in the slough of Christmas letters and bills, when my wife came in and asked me if I would take her to the Workhouse.

"My dear," I replied ponderously, but, I think, excusably, "you have, as usual, anticipated my intention, but I think we can hold out until after Christmas."

Philippa declined to pay the jest the respect to which its age entitled it, and replied inconsequently that I knew perfectly well that she could not drive the outside car with the children and the Christmas tree. I assented that they would make an awkward team, and offered, as a substitute for my services, those of Denis, the stopgap.

Those who live in Ireland best know the staying powers of stopgaps. Denis, uncle of Michael Leary the Whip, had been imported into the kennels during my ministry, to bridge a hiatus in the long dynasty of the kennel-boys, and had remained for eighteen months, a notable instance of the survival

of what might primarily have been considered the unfittest. That Denis should so long have endured his nephew's rule was due not so much to the tie of blood, as to the privileged irresponsibility of a stopgap. Nothing was expected of him, and he pursued an unmolested course, until the return of Flurry Knox from South Africa changed the general conditions. He then remained submerged until he drifted into the gap formed in my own establishment by Mr. Peter Cadogan's elopement.

Philippa's workhouse tea took place on Christmas Eve. We were still hurrying through an early luncheon when the nodding crest of the Christmas tree passed the dining-room windows. My youngest son immediately upset his pudding into his lap; and Philippa hustled forth to put on her hat, an operation which, like the making of an omelette, can apparently only be successfully performed at the last moment. With feelings of mingled apprehension and relief I saw the party drive from the door, the Christmas tree seated on one side of the car, Philippa on the other, clutching her offspring, Denis on the box, embosomed, like a wood-pigeon, in the boughs of the spruce fir. I congratulated myself that the Quaker, now white with the snows of many winters, was in the shafts. Had I not been too deeply engaged in so arranging the rug that it should not trail in the mud all the way to Skebawn, I might have noticed that the lamps had been forgotten.

It was, as I have said, Christmas Eve, and as the afternoon wore on I began to reflect upon what the road from Skebawn would be in another hour, full of drunken people, and, what was worse, of carts steered by drunken people. I had assured Philippa (with what I believe she describes as masculine *esprit de corps*) of Denis's adequacy as a driver, but that did not alter the fact that in the last rays of the setting sun, I got out my bicycle and set forth for the Workhouse. When I reached the town it was dark, but the Christmas shoppers showed no tendency to curtail their operations on that account, and the streets were filled with an intricate and variously moving tide of people and carts. The paraffin lamps in the shops did their best, behind bunches of holly, oranges, and monstrous Christmas candles, and partially illumined the press of dark-cloaked women, and more or less drunken men, who swayed and shoved and held vast conversations on the narrow pavements. The red glare of the chemist's globe transformed the leading female beggar of the town into a being from the Brocken; her usual Christmas family, contributed for the festival by the neighbours, as to a Christmas number, were grouped in fortunate ghastliness in the green light. She extracted from me her recognised tribute, and pursued by her assurance that she would forgive me now till Easter (*i.e.* that further alms would not be exacted for at least a fortnight), I made my way onward into the

outer darkness, beyond the uttermost link in the chain of public-houses.

The road that led to the Workhouse led also to the railway station; a quarter of a mile away the green light of a signal-post stood high in the darkness, like an emerald. As I neared the Workhouse I recognised the deliberate footfall of the Quaker, and presently his long pale face entered the circle illuminated by my bicycle-lamp. My family were not at all moved by my solicitude for their safety, but, being in want of an audience, were pleased to suggest that I should drive home with them. The road was disgustingly muddy; I tied my bicycle to the back of the car with the rope that is found in the wells of all outside cars. It was not till I had put out the bicycle-lamp that I noticed that the car-lamps had been forgotten, but Denis, true to the convention of his tribe, asseverated that he could see better without lights. I took the place vacated by the Christmas tree, the Quaker pounded on at his usual stone-breaking trot, and my offspring, in strenuous and entangled duet, declaimed to me the events of the afternoon.

It was without voice or warning that a row of men was materialised out of the darkness, under the Quaker's nose; they fell away to right and left, but one, as if stupefied, held on his way in the middle of the road. It is not easy to divert the Quaker from his course; we swung to the right, but the wing of the car, on my side, struck

the man full in the chest. He fell as instantly and solidly as if he were a stone pillar, and, like a stone, he lay in the mud. Loud and inebriate howls rose from the others, and, as if in answer, came a long and distant shriek from an incoming train. Upon this, without bestowing an instant's further heed to their fallen comrade, the party took to their heels and ran to the station. It was all done in a dozen seconds; by the time the Quaker was pulled up we were alone with our victim, and Denis was hoarsely suggesting to me that it would be better to drive away at once. I have often since then regretted that I did not take his advice.

The victim was a very small man; Denis and I dragged him to the side of the road, and propped him up against the wall. He was of an alarming limpness, but there was a something reassuring in the reek of whisky that arose as I leaned over him, trying to diagnose his injuries by the aid of a succession of lighted matches. His head lay crookedly on his chest; he breathed heavily, but peacefully, and his limbs seemed uninjured. Denis, at my elbow, did not cease to assure me, tremulously, that there was nothing ailed the man, that he was a stranger, and that it would be as good for us to go home. Philippa, on the car, strove as best she might with the unappeasable curiosity of her sons and with the pigheaded anxiety of the Quaker to get home to his dinner. At this juncture a voice, fifty

yards away in the darkness, uplifted itself in song—

"Heaven's refle-hex! Killa-ar-ney!"

it bawled hideously.

It fell as balm upon my ear, in its assurance of the proximity of Slipper.

"Sure I know the man well," he said, shielding the flame of a match in his hand with practised skill. "Wake up, me *bouchaleen!*" He shook him unmercifully. "Open your eyes, darlin'!"

The invalid here showed signs of animation by uttering an incoherent but, as it seemed, a threatening roar. It lifted Denis as a feather is lifted by a wind, and wafted him to the Quaker's head, where he remained in strict attention to his duties. It also lifted Philippa.

"Is he very bad, do you think?" she murmured at my elbow. "Shall I drive for the doctor?"

"Arrah, what docthor?" said Slipper magnificently. "Give me a half-a-crown, Major, and I'll get him what meddyceen will answer him as good as any docthor! Lave him to me!" He shook him again. "I'll regulate him!"

The victim here sat up, and shouted something about going home. He was undoubtedly very drunk. It seemed to me that Slipper's ministrations would be more suitable to the situation than mine, certainly than Philippa's. I administered the solatium; then I placed Denis on the box

of the car with the bicycle-lamp in his hand, and drove my family home.

After church next day we met Flurry Knox. He approached us with the green glint in his eye that told that game was on foot, whatever that game might be.

"Who bailed you out, Mrs. Yeates?" he said solicitously. "I heard you and the Major and Denis Leary were all in the lock-up for furious driving and killing a man! I'm told he was anointed last night."

Philippa directed what she believed to be a searching glance at Flurry's face of friendly concern.

"I don't believe a word of it!" she said dauntlessly, while a very becoming warmth in her complexion betrayed an inward qualm. "Who told you?"

"The servants heard it at first Mass this morning; and Slipper had me late for church telling me about it. The fellow says if he lives he's going to take an action against the Major."

I listened with, I hope, outward serenity. In dealings with Flurry Knox the possibility that he might be speaking the truth could never safely be lost sight of. It was also well to remember that he generally knew what the truth was.

I said loftily, that there had been nothing the matter with the man but Christmas Eve, and inquired if Flurry knew his name and address.

"Of course I do," said Flurry, "he's one of

those mountainy men that live up in the hill behind Aussolas. Oweneen the Sprat is the name he goes by, and he's the crossest little thief in the Barony. Never mind, Mrs. Yeates, I'll see you get fair play in the dock!"

"How silly you are!" said Philippa; but I could see that she was shaken.

Whatever Flurry's servants may have heard at first Mass, was apparently equalled, if not excelled, by what Denis heard at second. He asked me next morning, with a gallant attempt at indifference, if I had had any word of "the man-een."

"'Twas what the people were saying on the roads last night that he could have the law of us, and there was more was saying that he'd never do a day's good. Sure they say the backbone is cracked where the wheel of the car went over him! But didn't yourself and the misthress swear black and blue that the wheel never went next or nigh him? And didn't Michael say that there wasn't a Christmas this ten years that that one hadn't a head on him the size of a bullawawn with the len'th o' dhrink?"

In spite of the contributory negligence that might be assumed in the case of any one with this singular infirmity, I was not without a secret uneasiness. Two days afterwards I received a letter, written on copybook paper in a clerkly hand. It had the Aussolas post-mark, in addition to the imprint of various thumbs, and set forth

the injuries inflicted by me and my driver on Owen Twohig on Christmas Eve, and finally, it demanded a compensation of twenty pounds for the same. Failing this satisfaction the law was threatened, but a hope was finally expressed that the honourable gentleman would not see a poor man wronged; it was, in fact, the familiar mixture of bluff and whine, and, as I said to Philippa, the Man-een (under which title he had passed into the domestic vocabulary) had of course got hold of a letter writer to do the trick for him.

In the next day or so I met Flurry twice, and found him so rationally interested, and even concerned, about fresh versions of the accident that had cropped up, that I was moved to tell him of the incident of the letter. He looked serious, and said he would go up himself to see what was wrong with Oweneen. He advised me to keep out of it for the present, as they might open their mouths too big.

The moon was high as I returned from this interview; when I wheeled my bicycle into the yard I found that the coach-house in which I was wont to stable it was locked; so also was the harness-room. Attempting to enter the house by the kitchen door I found it also was locked; a gabble of conversation prevailed within, and with the mounting indignation of one who hears but cannot make himself heard, I banged ferociously on the door. Silence fell, and Mrs. Cadogan's voice implored heaven's protection.

"Open the door!" I roared.

A windlike rush of petticoats followed, through which came sibilantly the words, "Glory be to goodness! 'Tis the masther!"

The door opened, I found myself facing the entire strength of my establishment, including Denis, and augmented by Slipper.

"They told me you were asking afther me, Major," began Slipper, descending respectfully from the kitchen table, on which he had been seated.

I noticed that Mrs. Cadogan was ostentatiously holding her heart, and that Denis was shaking like the conventional aspen.

"What's all this about?" said I, looking round upon them. "Why is the whole place locked up?"

"It was a little unaisy they were," said Slipper, snatching the explanation from Mrs. Cadogan with the determination of the skilled leader of conversation; "I was telling them I seen two men below in the plantation, like they'd be watching out for some one, and poor Mr. Leary here got a reeling in his head after I telling it——"

"Indeed the crayture was as white, now, as white as a masheroon!" broke in Mrs. Cadogan, "and we dhrew him in here to the fire till your Honour came home."

"Nonsense!" I said angrily, "a couple of boys poaching rabbits! Upon my word, Slipper, you have very little to do coming here and frightening people for nothing."

"What did I say?" demanded Slipper, dramatically facing his audience, "only that I seen two men in the plantation. How would I know what business they had in it?"

"Ye said ye heard them whishling to each other like curlews through the wood," faltered Denis, "and sure that's the whishle them Twohigs has always——"

"Maybe it's whistling to the girls they were!" suggested Slipper, with an unabashed eye at Hannah.

I told him to come up with me to my office, and stalked from the kitchen, full of the comfortless wrath that has failed to find a suitable victim.

The interview in the office did not last long, nor was it in any way reassuring. Slipper, with the manner of the confederate who had waded shoulder to shoulder with me through gore, could only tell me that though he believed that there was nothing ailed the Man-een, he wouldn't say but what he might be sevarely hurted. That I wasn't gone five minutes before near a score of the Twohigs come leathering down out of the town in two ass-butts (this term indicates donkey-carts of the usual dimensions), and when Oweneen felt them coming, he let the most unmarciful screech, upon which Slipper, in just fear of the Twohigs, got over the wall, and executed a strategic retreat upon the railway station, leaving the Twohigs to carry away their wounded to the mountains. That for himself he had

been going in dread of them ever since, and for no one else in the wide world would he have put a hand to one of them.

I preserved an unshaken front towards Slipper, and I was subsequently sarcastic and epigrammatic to Philippa on the subject of the curlews who were rabbiting in the plantation, but something that I justified to myself as a fear of Philippa's insatiable conscientiousness, made me resolve that I would, without delay, go "back in the mountain," and interview Oweneen the Sprat.

New Year's Day favoured my purpose, bringing with it clear frost and iron roads, a day when even the misanthropic soul of a bicycle awakens into sympathy and geniality. I started in the sunny vigour of the early afternoon, I sailed up the hills with the effortless speed of a seagull, I free-wheeled down them with the dive of a swallow, and, as it seemed to me, with a good deal of its grace. Had Oweneen the Sprat had the luck to have met me when, at the seventh milestone from Shreelane, I realised that I had beaten my own best time by seven minutes, he could practically have made his own terms. At that point, however, I had to leave the high road, and the mountain lane that ensued restored to me the judicial frame of mind. In the first twenty yards my bicycle was transformed from a swallow to an opinionated and semi-paralysed wheelbarrow; struggling in a species of dry water-course I shoved it up the steep gradients of a large

and brown country of heather and bog, silent save for the contending voices of the streams. A family of goats, regarding me from a rocky mound, was the first hint of civilisation ; a more reliable symptom presently advanced in the shape of a lean and hump-backed sow, who bestowed on me a side glance of tepid interest as she squeezed past.

The *bohireen* dropped, with a sudden twist to the right, and revealed a fold in the hillside, containing a half-dozen or so of little fields, crooked, and heavily walled, and nearly as many thatched cabins, flung about in the hollows as indiscriminately as the boulders upon the wastes outside. A group of children rose in front of me like a flight of starlings, and scudded with barefooted nimbleness to the shelter of the houses, in a pattering, fluttering stampede. I descended upon the nearest cabin of the colony. The door was shut ; a heavy padlock linking two staples said Not at Home, and the nose of a dog showed in a hole above the sill, sniffing deeply and suspiciously. I remembered that the first of January was a holy-day, and that every man in the colony had doubtless betaken himself to the nearest village. The next cottage was some fifty yards away, and the faces of a couple of children peered at me round the corner of it. As I approached they vanished, but the door of the cabin was open, and blue turf smoke breathed placidly outwards from it. The merciful frost had glazed the inevitable dirty pool in front of the door.

and had made practicable the path beside it; I propped my bicycle against a rock, and projected into the dark interior an inquiry as to whether there was any one in.

I had to repeat it twice before a small old woman with white hair and a lemon-coloured face appeared; I asked her if she could tell me where Owen Twohig lived.

"Your Honour's welcome," she replied, tying the strings of her cap under her chin with wiry fingers, and eyeing me with concentrated shrewdness. I repeated the question.

She responded by begging me to come in and rest myself, for this was a cross place and a backwards place, and I should be famished with the cold—"sure them little wheels dhraws the wind."

I ignored this peculiarity of bicycles, and, not without exasperation, again asked for Owen Twohig.

"Are you Major Yeates, I beg your pardon?" I assented to what she knew as well as I did.

"Why then 'tis here he lives indeed, in this little house, and a poor place he have to live in. Sure he's my son, the crayture—" her voice at once ascended to the key of lamentation—"faith, he didn't rise till to-day. Since Christmas Eve I didn't quinch light in the house with him stretched in the bed always, and not a bit passed his lips night or day, only one suppeen of whisky in its purity. Ye'd think the tongue would light out of his mouth with

the heat, and ye'd see the blaze of darkness in his face! I hadn't as much life in me this morning as that I could wash my face!"

I replied that I wanted to speak to her son, and was in a hurry.

"He's not within, asthore, he's not within at all. He got the lend of a little donkey, and he went back the mountain to the bonesetter, to try could he straighten the leg with him."

"Did Dr. Hickey see him?" I demanded.

"Sure a wise woman came in from Finnaun, a' Stephen's Day," pursued Mrs. Twohig swiftly, "and she bet three spits down on him, and she said it's what ailed him he had the Fallen Palate, with the dint o' the blow the car bet him in the poll, and that any one that have the Fallen Palate might be speechless for three months with it. She took three ribs of his hair then, and she was pulling them till she was in a passpiration, and in the latther end she pulled up the palate." She paused and wiped her eyes with her apron. "But the leg is what has him destroyed altogether; she told us we should keep sheep's butter rubbed to it in the place where the thrack o' the wheel is down in it."

The blush of a frosty sunset was already in the sky, and the children who had fled before me had returned, reinforced by many others, to cluster in a whispering swarm round my bicycle, and to group themselves attentively in the rear of the conversation.

"Look here, Mrs. Twohig," I said, not as yet angry, but in useful proximity to it, "I've had a letter from your son, and he and his friends have been trying to frighten my man, Denis Leary; he can come down and see me if he has anything to say, but you can tell him from me that I'm not going to stand this sort of thing!"

If the Widow Twohig had been voluble before, this pronouncement had the effect of bringing her down in spate. She instantly, and at the top of her voice, called heaven to witness her innocence, and the innocence of her "little boy"; still at full cry, she sketched her blameless career, and the unmerited suffering that had ever pursued her and hers; how, during the past thirty years, she had been drooping over her little orphans, and how Oweneen, that was the only one she had left to do a hand's turn for her, would be "under clutches" the longest day that he'd live. It was at about this point that I gave her five shillings. It was a thoroughly illogical act, but at the moment it seemed inevitable, and Mrs. Twohig was good enough to accept it in the same spirit. I told her that I would send Dr. Hickey to see her son (which had, it struck me, a somewhat stemming effect upon her eloquence), and I withdrew, still in magisterial displeasure. I must have been half way down the lane before it was revealed to me that a future on crutches was what Mrs. Twohig anticipated for her son.

By that night's post I wrote to Hickey, a strictly

impartial letter, stating the position, and asking him to see Owen Twohig, and to let me have his professional opinion upon him. Philippa added a postscript, asking for a nerve-tonic for the parlour-maid, a Dublin girl, who, since the affair of the curlews in the plantation, had lost all colour and appetite, and persisted in locking the hall door day and night, to the infinite annoyance of the dogs.

Next morning, while hurrying through an early breakfast, preparatory to starting for a distant Petty Sessions, I was told that Denis wished to speak to me at the hall door. This, as I before have had occasion to point out, boded affairs of the first importance. I proceeded to the hall door, and there found Denis, pale as the Lily Maid of Astolat, with three small fishes in his hand.

"There was one of thim before me in my bed lasht night!" he said in a hoarse and shaken whisper, "and there was one in the windy in the harness-room, down on top o' me razor, and there was another nelt to the stable door with the nail of a horse's shoe."

I made the natural suggestion that some one had done it for a joke.

"Thim's no joke, sir," replied Denis, portentously, "thim's Sprats!"

"Well, I'm quite aware of that," I said, unmoved by what appeared to be the crushing significance of the statement.

"Oweneen the *Sprat!*" murmured Philippa, illuminatingly, emerging from the dining-room door

with her cup of tea in her hand, "it's Hannah, trying to frighten him!"

Hannah, the housemaid, was known to be the humorist of the household.

"He have a brother a smith, back in the mountain," continued Denis, wrapping up the sprats and the nail in his handkerchief; "'twas for a token he put the nail in it. If he dhraws thim mountainy men down on me, I may as well go under the sod. It isn't yourself or the misthress they'll folly; it's meself." He crept down the steps as deplorably as the Jackdaw of Rheims, "and it's what Michael's after telling me, they have it all through the country that I said you should throw Twohig in the ditch, and it was good enough for the likes of him, and I said to Michael 'twas a lie for them, and that we cared him as tender as if he was our mother itself, and we'd have given the night to him only for the misthress that was roaring on the car, and no blame to her; sure the world knows the mother o' children has no courage!"

This drastic generality was unfortunately lost to my wife, as she had retired to hold a court of inquiry in the kitchen.

The inquiry elicited nothing beyond the fact that since Christmas Day Denis was "using no food," and that the kitchen, so far from indulging in practical jokes at his expense, had been instant throughout in sympathy, and in cups of strong tea, administered for the fortification of the nerves.

All were obviously deeply moved by the incident of the sprats, the parlour-maid, indeed, having already locked herself into the pantry, through the door of which, on Philippa's approach, she gave warning hysterically

The matter remained unexplained, and was not altogether to my liking. As I drove down the avenue, and saw Denis carefully close the yard gates after me, I determined that I would give Murray, the District Inspector of Police, a brief sketch of the state of affairs. I did not meet Murray, but, as it happened, this made no difference. Things were already advancing smoothly and inexorably towards their preordained conclusion.

I have since heard that none of the servants went to bed that night. They, including Denis, sat in the kitchen, with locked doors, drinking tea and reciting religious exercises ; Maria, as a further precaution, being chained to the leg of the table. Their fears were in no degree allayed by the fact that nothing whatever occurred, and the most immediate result of the vigil was that my bath next morning boiled as it stood in the can, and dimmed the room with clouds of steam—a circumstance sufficiently rare in itself, and absolutely without precedent on Sunday morning. The next feature of the case was a letter at breakfast time from a gentleman signing himself "Jas. Fitzmaurice." He said that Dr. Hickey having gone away for a fortnight's holiday, he (Fitzmaurice) was acting as his locum tenens. In

that capacity he had opened my letter, and would go and see Twohig as soon as possible. He enclosed prescription for tonic as requested.

It was a threatening morning, and we did not go to church. I noticed that my wife's housekeeping *séance* was unusually prolonged, and even while I smoked and read the papers, I was travelling in my meditations to the point of determining that I would have a talk with the priest about all this infernal nonsense. When Philippa at length rejoined me, I found that she also had arrived at a conclusion, impelled thereto by the counsels of Mrs. Cadogan, abetted by her own conscience.

Its result was that immediately after lunch, long before the Sunday roast beef had been slept off, I found myself carting precarious parcels—a jug, a bottle, a pudding-dish—to the inside car, in which Philippa had already placed herself, with a pair of blankets and various articles culled from my wardrobe (including a pair of boots to which I was sincerely attached). Denis, pale yellow in complexion and shrouded in gloom, was on the box, the Quaker was in the shafts. There was no rain, but the clouds hung black and low.

It was an expedition of purest charity; so Philippa explained to me over again as we drove away. She said nothing of propitiation or diplomacy. For my part I said nothing at all, but I reflected on the peculiar gifts of the Dublin parlour-maid in valeting me, and decided that it might be better to allow

Philippa to run the show on her own lines, while I maintained an attitude of large-minded disapproval.

The blankets took up as much room in the car as a man ; I had to hold in my hand a jug of partly jellified beef tea. A sourer Lady Bountiful never set forth upon an errand of mercy. To complete establishment—in the words of the *Gazette*—Maria and Minx, on the floor of the car, wrought and strove in ceaseless and objectless agitation, an infliction due to the ferocity of a female rival, who terrorised the high road within hail of my gates. I thanked heaven that I had at least been firm about not taking the children ; for the dogs, at all events, the moment of summary ejectment would arrive sooner or later.

Seven miles in an inside car are seven miles indeed. The hills that had run to meet my bicycle and glided away behind it, now sat in their places to be crawled up and lumbered down, at such a pace as seemed good to the Quaker, whose appetite for the expedition was, if possible, less than that of his driver. Appetite was, indeed, the last thing suggested by the aspect of Denis. His drooping shoulders and deplorable countenance proclaimed apology and deprecation to the mountain tops, and more especially to the mountainy men. Looking back on it now, I recognise the greatness of the tribute to my valour and omnipotence that he should have consented thus to drive us into the heart of the enemy's country.

A steep slope, ending with a sharp turn through a cutting, reminded me that we were near the mountain *bohireen* that was our goal. I got out and walked up the hill, stiffly, because the cramp of the covered car was in my legs. Stiff though I was, I had outpaced the Quaker, and was near the top of the hill, when something that was apparently a brown croquet-ball rolled swiftly round the bend above me, charged into the rock wall of the cutting with a clang, and came on down the hill with a weight and venom unknown to croquet-balls. It sped past me, missed the Quaker by an uncommonly near shave, and went on its way, hotly pursued by the two dogs, who, in the next twenty yards, discovered with horror that it was made of iron, a fact of which I was already aware.

I have always been as lenient as the law, and other circumstances, would allow towards the illegal game of "bowling." It consists in bowling an iron ball along a road, the object being to cover the greatest possible distance in a given number of bowls. It demands considerable strength and skill, and it is played with a zest much enhanced by its illegality and by its facilities as a medium for betting. The law forbids it, on account of its danger to the unsuspecting wayfarer, in consideration of which a scout is usually posted ahead to signal the approach of the police, and to give warning to passers by. The mountainy men, trusting to their isolation, had neglected this precaution,

with results that came near being serious to the Quaker, and filled with wrath, both personal and official, I took the hill at a vengeful run, so as to catch the bowler red-handed. At the turn in the cutting I met him face to face. As a matter of fact he nearly ran into my arms, and the yelp of agony with which he dodged my impending embrace is a life-long possession. He was a very small man ; he doubled like a rabbit, and bolted back towards a swarm of men who were following the fortunes of the game. He flitted over the wall by the roadside, and was away over the rocky hillside at a speed that even in my best days would have left me nowhere.

The swarm on the road melted ; a good part of it was quietly absorbed by the lane up which I had dragged my bicycle two days before, the remainder, elaborately uninterested and respectable, in their dark blue Sunday clothes, strolled gravely in the opposite direction. A man on a bicycle met them, and dismounted to speak to the leaders. I wondered if he were a policeman in plain clothes on the prowl. He came on to meet me, leading his bicycle, and I perceived that a small black leather bag was strapped to the carrier. He was young, and apparently very hot.

" I beg your pardon," he said in the accents of Dublin, " I understand you're Major Yeates. I'm Dr. Hickey's ' Locum,' and I've come out to see the man you wrote to me about. From what you said I thought it better to lose no time."

I was rather out of breath, but I expressed my sense of indebtedness.

"I think there must be some mistake," went on the "Locum." "I've just asked these men on the road where Owen Twohig lives, and one of them—the fellow they call Skipper, or some such name—said Owen Twohig was the little chap that's just after sprinting up the mountain. He seemed to think it was a great joke. I suppose you're sure Owen was the name?"

"Perfectly sure," I said heavily.

The eyes of Dr. Fitzmaurice had travelled past me, and were regarding with professional alertness something farther down the road. I followed their direction, dreamily, because in spirit I was far away, tracking Flurry Knox through deep places.

On the hither side of the rock cutting the covered car had come to a standstill. The reins had fallen from Denis's hands; he was obviously having the "wakeness" appropriate to the crisis. Philippa, on the step below him, was proffering to him the jug of beef tea and the bottle of port. He accepted the latter.

"He knows what's what!" said the "Locum."

XII

THE WHITEBOYS

Part I

It has been said by an excellent authority that children and dogs spoil conversation. I can confidently say that had Madame de Sévigné and Dr. Johnson joined me and my family on our wonted Sunday afternoon walk to the kennels, they would have known what it was to be ignored. This reflection bears but remotely on the matter in hand, but is, I think, worthy of record. I pass on to a certain still and steamy afternoon in late September, when my wife and I headed forth in the accustomed way, accompanied by, or (to be accurate) in pursuit of, my two sons, my two dogs, and a couple of hound puppies, to view that spectacle of not unmixed attractiveness, the feeding of the hounds.

Flurry Knox and Michael were superintending the operation when we arrived, coldly observing the gobbling line at the trough, like reporters at a public dinner. It was while the last horrid remnants of the repast were being wolfed that my wife

hesitatingly addressed Mr. Knox's First Whip and Kennel Huntsman.

"Michael," she said, lowering her voice, "you know the children's old donkey that I spoke to you about last week—I'm afraid you *had* better——"

"Sure he's boiled, ma'am," said Michael with swift and awful brevity, "that's him in the throch now!"

Philippa hastily withdrew from the vicinity of the trough, murmuring something incoherent about cannibals or parricides, I am not sure which, and her eldest son burst into tears that were only assuaged by the tactful intervention of the kennel-boy with the jawbone of a horse, used for propping open the window of the boiler-house.

"Never mind, Mrs. Yeates," said Flurry consolingly, "the new hounds that I'm getting won't be bothered with donkeys as long as there's a sheep left in the country, if the half I hear of them is true!" He turned to me. "Major, I didn't tell you I have three couple of O'Reilly's old Irish hounds bought. They're the old white breed y'know, and they say they're terrors to hunt."

"They'd steal a thing out of your eye," said Michael, evidently reverting to an interrupted discussion between himself and his master. "There's a woman of the O'Reillys married back in the country here, and she says they killed two cows last season."

"If they kill any cows with me, I'll stop the price

of them out of your wages, Michael, my lad!" said Flurry to his henchman's back. "Look here, Major, come on with me to-morrow to bring them home!"

It was, I believe, no more than fifty miles across country to the mountain fastness of the O'Reillys, and a certain chord of romance thrilled at the thought of the old Irish breed of white hounds, with their truly national qualities of talent, rebelliousness, and love of sport. Playboy was one of the same race—Playboy, over whose recapture, it may be remembered, I had considerably distinguished myself during my term of office as M.F.H.

I went. At one o'clock next day two lines of rail had done their uttermost for us, and had ceded the task of conveying us to Fahoura to the inevitable outside car. And still there remained a long flank of mountain to be climbed; the good little slave in the shafts made no complaint, but save for the honour and glory of the thing we might as well have walked; certainly of the seven Irish miles of road, thrown over the pass like a strap over a trunk, our consciences compelled us to tramp at least three. A stream, tawny and translucent as audit ale, foamed and slid among its brown boulders beside us at the side of the road; as we crawled upwards the fields became smaller, and the lonely white-washed cottages ceased. The heather came down to the wheel marks, and a pack of grouse suddenly whizzed across the road like a shot fired across our bows to warn us off.

At the top of the pass we stood and looked out over half a county to the pale peaks of Killarney.

"There's Fahoura now, gentlemen," said the carman, pointing downwards with his whip to a group of whitewashed farm buildings, that had gathered themselves incongruously about a square grey tower. "I'm told old Mr. O'Reilly's sick this good while."

"What ails him?" said Flurry.

"You wouldn't know," said the carman, "sure he's very old, and that 'fluenzy has the country destroyed; there's people dying now that never died before."

"That's bad," said Flurry sympathetically. "I had a letter from him a week ago, and he only said he was parting the hounds because he couldn't run with them any more."

"Ah, don't mind him!" said the carman, "it's what it is he'd sooner sell them now, than to give the nephew the satisfaction of them, after himself'd be dead."

"Is that the chap that's been hunting them for him?" said Flurry, while I, for the hundredth time, longed for Flurry's incommunicable gift of being talked to.

"It is, sir; Lukey O'Reilly—" the carman gave a short laugh. "That's the lad! They say he often thried to go to America, but he never got south of Mallow; he gets that drunk sayin' good-bye to his friends!"

"Maybe the old fellow will live a while yet, just to spite him," suggested Flurry.

"Well, maybe he would, faith!" agreed the carman, "didn't the docthor say to meself that maybe it's walking the road I'd be, and I to fall down dead!" he continued complacently, "but sure them docthors, when they wouldn't know what was in it, they should be saying something!"

We here turned into the lane that led to Mr. O'Reilly's house.

We pulled up at the gate of a wide farmyard, with outcrops of the brown mountain rock in it, and were assailed in the inevitable way by the inevitable mongrel collies. Blent with their vulgar abuse was the mellow baying of hounds, coming, seemingly, from the sky. The carman pointed to the tower which filled an angle of the yard, and I saw, about twenty feet from the ground, an arrow-slit, through which protruded white muzzles, uttering loud and tuneful threats.

"The kitchen door's the handiest way," said Flurry, "but I suppose for grandeur we'd better go to the front of the house."

He opened a side gate, and I followed him through a wind-swept enclosure that by virtue of two ragged rose-bushes, and a walk edged with white stones, probably took rank as a garden. At the front door we knocked; a long pause ensued, and finally bare feet thudded down a passage, a crack of the door was opened, and an eye glistened for a moment in

the crack. It was slammed again, and after a further delay it was reopened, this time by a large elderly woman with crinkled black and grey hair and one long and commanding tooth in the front of her mouth.

"Why then I wasn't looking to see ye till to-morrow, Mr. Knox!" she began, beaming upon Flurry, "but sure ye're welcome any day and all day, and the gentleman too!"

The gentleman was introduced, and felt himself being summed up in a single glance of Miss O'Reilly's nimble brown eyes. With many apologies, she asked us if we would come and see her brother in the kitchen, as he did not feel well enough to walk out to the parlour, and she couldn't keep him in the bed at all.

The kitchen differed more in size than in degree from that of the average cabin. There were the same hummocky earthen floor, the same sallow whitewashed walls, the same all-pervading turf smoke—the difference was in the master of the house. He was seated by the fire in an angular armchair, with an old horse-blanket over his knees, and a stick in his hand, and beside him lay an ancient white hound, who scarcely lifted her head at our entrance. The old man laboured to his feet, and, bent as he was, he towered over Flurry as he took his hand.

"Your father's son is welcome, Mr. Florence Knox, and your friend—" He was short of breath,

and he lowered his great frame into his chair again. "Sit down, gentlemen, sit down!" he commanded. "Joanna! These gentlemen are after having a long drive——"

The clink of glasses told that the same fact had occurred to Miss O'Reilly, and a bottle of port, and another of what looked like water, but was in effect old potheen, were immediately upon the table.

"How well ye wouldn't put down a glass for me!" thundered old O'Reilly. "I suppose it's saving it for my wake you are!"

"Or her own wedding, maybe!" said Flurry, shamelessly ogling Miss O'Reilly, "we'll see that before the wake, I'm thinking!"

"Well, well, isn't he the dead spit of his father!" said Miss O'Reilly to the rafters.

"Here, woman, give me the kettle," said her brother, "I'll drink my glass of punch with Mr. Florence Knox, the way I did with his father before him! The doctor says I might carry out six months, and I think myself I won't carry out the week, but what the divil do I care! I'm going to give Mr. Knox his pick of my hounds this day, and that's what no other man in Ireland would get, and be dam we'll wet our bargain!"

"Well, well," said Miss O'Reilly remonstratingly, bringing the kettle, "and you that was that weak last night that if you got Ireland's crown you couldn't lift the bedclothes off your arms!"

"Them hounds are in my family, seed and breed, this hundred years and more," continued old O'Reilly, silencing his sister with one black glance from under his thick grey brows, "and if I had e'er a one that was fit to come after me they'd never leave it!" He took a gulp of the hot punch. "Did ye ever hear of my brother Phil that was huntsman to the Charlevilles long ago, Mr. Knox? Your father knew him well. Many's the good hunt they rode together. He wasn't up to forty years when he was killed, broke his neck jumping a hurl, and when they went to bury him it's straight in over the churchyard wall they took him! They said he never was one to go round looking for a gate!"

"May the Lord have mercy on him!" murmured Miss O'Reilly in the background.

"Amen!" growled the old man, taking another pull at his steaming tumbler, as if he were drinking his brother's health. "And look at me here," he went on, reddening slowly through the white stubble on his cheeks, "dying as soft as any owld cow in a boghole, and all they'll be saying afther me is asking would they get their bellyful of whisky at my wake! I tell you this—and let you be listening to me, Joanna!—what hounds Mr. Knox doesn't take, I'll not leave them afther me to be disgraced in the counthry, running rabbits on Sunday afternoons with them poaching blackguards up out of the town! No! But they'll have a stone

round their neck and to be thrown below in the lough ! "

I thought of the nephew Luke, whose friends had so frequently failed to see him off, and I felt very sorry for old O'Reilly.

" They will, they will, to be sure ! " said Miss O'Reilly soothingly. " And look at you now, the way you are ! Didn't I know well you had no call to be drinking punch, you that was coughing all night. On the face of God's earth, Mr. Knox, I never heard such a cough ! 'Tis like a sheep's cough ! I declare it's like the sound of the beating of the drum ! "

" Well, Mr. O'Reilly," said Flurry, ignoring these remarkable symptoms, but none the less playing to her lead, " I suppose we might have a look at the hounds now."

" Go, tell Tom to open the tower door," said old O'Reilly to his sister, after a moment's silence. He handed her a key. " And shut the gate you."

As soon as she had gone he got on to his feet. " Mr. Knox, sir," he said, " might I put as much trouble on you as to move out this chair to the door ? I'll sit there the way I can see them. Maybe the other gentleman would reach me down the horn that's up on the wall. He's near as tall as meself."

Flurry did as he asked, and helped him across the room.

" Close out the half-door if you please, Mr. Knox,

and give me the old rug that's there, my feet is destroyed with the rheumatics."

He dropped groaningly into his chair, and I handed him the horn, an old brass one, bent and dinted.

Already the clamour of the hounds in the tower had broken out like bells in a steeple, as they heard the footsteps of their jailor on the stone steps of their prison.

Then Tom's voice, shouting at them in Irish to stand back, and then through the narrow door of the tower the hounds themselves, a striving torrent of white flecked with pale yellow, like one of their own mountain streams. There were about seven couples of them, and in a moment they overran the yard like spilt quicksilver.

"Look at them now, Mr. Knox!" said their owner, "they'd take a line over the hob of hell this minute!"

Pending this feat they took a very good line into what was apparently the hen-house, judging by the hysterics that proceeded from within. Almost immediately one of them reappeared with an egg in his mouth. Old O'Reilly gave a laugh and an attempt at a holloa. "Ah ha! That's Whiteboy! The rogue!" he said, and putting the horn to his lips he blew a thin and broken note, that was cut short by a cough. Speechlessly he handed the horn to Flurry, but no further summons was needed; the hounds had heard him. They converged upon the doorway with a rush,

and Flurry and I were put to it to keep them from jumping in over the half-door.

I had never seen hounds like them before. One or two were pure white, but most had some touch of faded yellow or pale grey about them; they were something smaller than the average foxhound, and were strongly built, and active as terriers. Their heads were broad, their ears unrounded, and their legs and feet were far from complying with the prescribed bedpost standard; but wherein, to the unprofessional eye, they chiefly differed from the established pattern, was in the human lawlessness of their expression. The old hound by the fire had struggled up at the note of the horn, and stood staring in perplexity at her master, and growling, with all the arrogance of the favourite, at her descendants, who yelped, and clawed, and strove, and thrust their muzzles over the half-door.

Flurry regarded them in silence.

"There's not a straight one among them," he whispered in my ear through the din.

"There they are for you now, Mr. Knox," said old O'Reilly, still panting after his fit of coughing. "There isn't another man in Ireland would get them but yourself, and you've got them, as I might say, a present!"

Flurry and I went out into the yard, and the door was closed behind us.

The examination—I may say the cross-examination—of the hounds that followed, was conducted

by Flurry and Michael to the accompaniment of a saga from Tom, setting forth their miraculous merits and achievements, to which, at suitable points, the carman shouted "Selah," or words to that effect, through the bars of the gate. At the end of half an hour Flurry had sorted out six of them; these were then coupled, and by dint of the exertions of all present, were bestowed in a cart with sides like a crate, in which pigs went to the fair.

We did not see our host again. His sister told us that he had gone to bed and wasn't fit to see any one, but he wished Mr. Knox luck with his bargain, and he sent him this for a luck-penny. She handed Flurry the dinted horn.

"I'm thinking it's fretting after the hounds he is," she said, turning her head away to hide the tears in her brown eyes. I have never until then known Flurry completely at a loss for an answer.

Part II

A fortnight afterwards—to be precise, it was the 10th of October—I saw the white hounds in the field. I had gone through the dreary routine of the cub-hunter. The alarm clock had shrilled its exulting and age-long summons in the pitchy dark. I had burnt my fingers with the spirit-lamp, and my mouth with hot cocoa; I had accomplished my bathless toilet, I had groped my way through

the puddles in the stable yard, and got on to my horse by the light of a lantern, and at 5.30 A.M. I was over the worst, and had met Flurry and the hounds, with Michael and Dr. Jerome Hickey, at the appointed cross-roads. The meet was nine miles away, in a comparatively unknown land, to which Flurry had been summoned by tales of what appeared to be an absolute epidemic of foxes, accompanied by bills for poultry and threats of poison. It was still an hour before sunrise, but a pallor was in the sky, and the hounds, that had at first been like a gliding shoal of fish round the horses' feet, began to take on their own shapes and colours.

The white Irish hounds were the first to disclose themselves, each coupled up with a tried old stager. I had been away from home for the past ten days, and knew nothing of their conduct in their new quarters, and finding Flurry uncommunicative, I fell back presently to talk about them to Michael.

"Is it settling down they are?" said Michael derisively. "That's the fine settling down! Roaring and screeching every minute since they came into the place! And as for fighting! They weren't in the kennel three days before they had Rampant ate, and nothing only his paws left before me in the morning! I didn't give one night in my bed since, with running down to them. The like o' them trash isn't fit for a gentleman's kennels. Them O'Reillys had them rared very pettish; it'd

be as good for me to be trying to turn curlews as them!"

The indictment of "The Whiteboys" (a title sarcastically bestowed by Dr. Hickey), their sheep-killing, their dog-hunting, with the setting forth of Michael's trials, talents, and unrequited virtues, lasted, like an Arabian Nights' tale, till the rising of the sun, and also until our arrival at the place we were first to draw. This was a long and deep ravine, red with bracken, bushy with hazel and alders; a black stream raced downwards through it, spreading at the lower end into bog, green, undefined, entirely treacherous; a place that instantly assures the rider that if hounds get away on its farther side he will not be with them.

A couple of men were waiting for us at the lower end of the ravine.

"They're in it surely!" they said, shoving down a stone gap for our benefit; "there isn't a morning but we'll see the owld fellow and his pups funning away for themselves down by the river. My little fellows, when they does be going to school in the morning, couldn't hardly pass his nest for the fume that'd be from it."

The first ten minutes proved that the foxes were certainly there, and during the following half-hour pandemonium itself raged in the ravine. There were, I believe, a brace and a half of cubs on foot; they were to me invisible, but they were viewed about twice in every minute by Flurry and his

subordinates, and continuously by a few early-rising countrymen, who had posted themselves along the edges of the ravine. The yells of the latter went up like steam whistles, and the hounds, among whom were five couple of newly entered puppies, were wilder than I had ever known them. They burst through the bracken and strove in the furze, in incessant full cry, and still the cubs doubled and dodged, and made détours round the valley, and Flurry and Michael roared themselves inside out, without producing the smallest effect upon anything save their own larynxes. No less than three times a fox was frantically holloaed away, and when, by incredible exertions on all our parts, the hounds, or a fair proportion of them, had been got together on to the line, a fresh outburst of yells announced that, having run a ring, he had returned to the covert.

Each of these excursions involved—

1. Scrambling at best speed down a rocky hill-side.
2. Coercing a diffident horse across a noisy stream, masked by briars, out of bog, on to rock.
3. Reverse of the first proceedings.
4. Arrival, blown and heated, at the boggy end of the valley, to find the original conditions prevailing as before.

I should, perhaps, have already mentioned that I was riding a young horse, to whom I was showing

hounds for the first time. My idea had been to permit him, strictly as an onlooker, to gather some idea of the rudiments of the game. He was a good young horse, with the large gravity of demeanour that is often the result of a domestic bringing up in the family of a small farmer; and when the moment came, and I was inexorably hustled into acting as Third Whip, he followed in the wake of Dr. Hickey with an anxious goodwill that made even his awkwardness attractive.

Throughout these excursions I noticed, as far as I was able to notice anything, the independent methods of the O'Reilly draft. They ignored the horn, eluded Michael, and laughed at Hickey and me; they hunted with bloodthirsty intentness and entirely after their own devices. Their first achievement was to run the earth-stopper's dog, and having killed him, to eat him. This horrid feat they accomplished, secure from interruption, in the briary depths of the ravine; and while the main body of the pack were industriously tow-rowing up and down the stream after their lawful fox, a couple of goats were only saved from "The Whiteboys" by miracles of agility and courage on the part of the countrymen. The best that could be said for them was that, "linking one virtue to a thousand crimes," whenever the hounds got fairly out of covert, the Whiteboys were together, and were in front.

It was about eight o'clock, and the fierce red

and grey sunrise had been overridden by a regiment of stormy clouds, when one of the foxes met his fate, amid ear-piercing whoops, and ecstatic comments from the onlookers, who had descended from the hill-tops with the speed of *ski*-runners.

"Aha! that's the lad had many a fat duck under his rib!"

"He had, faith! I'll go bail 'twas him that picked me wife's fashionable cocks!"

"Well, I'm told that if ye'll see a fox taking a hen or a goose, and ye'll call to him in Irish, that he'll drop it," remarked an older man to me, as we waited while Flurry and Hickey, in their capacity of butler and footman to the hounds' repast, snatched the few remaining morsels from the elder revellers and endeavoured to force them upon the deeply-reluctant young entry, who, having hunted with the innocent enthusiasm of the *débutante*, thought as little of the ensuing meal as the *débutante* thinks of supper at her first ball.

"I wonder why the deuce Michael can't get those Irish hounds," said Flurry, catching at the word and looking round. "I only have Lily here."

(Lily, I should say, was the romantic name of one of the Whiteboys.)

"I believe I seen a two-three of the white dogs running east awhile ago," said the elderly farmer, "and they yowling!"

"They're likely killing a sheep now," murmured Hickey to me.

At the same moment I chanced to look up towards the western end of the ravine, and saw what seemed to be five seagulls gliding up a rift of grass that showed green between rocks and heather.

"There are your white hounds, Flurry," I called out, "and they're hunting."

"Well, well," said the farmer, "they're afther wheeling round the length of the valley in the minute! They're nearly able to fly!"

A distant holloa from Michael, whose head alone was visible above a forest of furze, rose like a rocket at the end of the sentence, and every hound sprang to attention.

Once more we traversed the valley at full speed, and tackled the ladder of mud that formed the cattle track up the ravine; slough up to the horses' knees, furze bushes and briars meeting over their heads and ours, hounds and country boys jostling to get forward, with pistol shots behind from Hickey's thong, and the insistent doubling of Flurry's horn in front. Up that green rift I went on foot, and, as it were, hand in hand with my admirable young horse. The rift, on closer acquaintance, proved to be green with the deceitful verdure of swampy grass; (in Ireland, it may be noted, water runs uphill, and the subtlest bogholes lie in wait for their prey on the mountain tops). As we ascended, the wind that had risen with the sun fought us every inch of the way, and by the time I had won to level ground, I was speechless, and blowing like the bellows of

a forge. A country boy, whose grinning purple face remains a fond and imperishable memory, caught me by the leg and rammed me into my saddle; just in front of me Flurry, also speechless, with his foot not as yet in his off stirrup, was getting up to his hounds. These were casting themselves uncertainly over a sedgy and heathery slope, on which, in this wind, the hottest scent would soon be chilled to its marrow. Of Michael and the Whiteboys nothing was to be seen.

At a little distance a young man was grasping by the ears and nose a donkey with a back-load of bracken, and a misplaced ardour for the chase.

"Did ye see the fox?" bellowed Flurry.

"I did! I did!"

"Which way did he go?"

"Yerrah! aren't yer dogs after ateing him below!" shouted the young man, waltzing strenuously with the donkey.

"Well, there's a pair of you!" replied Flurry, cracking his whip viciously at the donkey's tail, and thereby much stimulating the dance, "and if I was given my choice of ye it's the ass I'd take! Here, come on out of this, Hickey!" He shoved ahead. "Put those hounds on to me, can't you!"

During this interchange of amenities Lily had wandered aside, and now, far to the left of the rest of the pack, was thoughtfully nosing along through tufts of rushes; she worked her way

down to a fence, and then, mute as a wraith, slid over it and slipped away across a grass field, still in jealous silence.

"Hark forrad to Lily, hounds!" roared Flurry, with electrical suddenness. "Put them on to her, Jerome!"

"Well, those white hounds are the divil!" said Dr. Hickey, with a break of admiration in his voice, as the hounds, suddenly driving ahead, proclaimed to heaven that they had got the line. They were running up a fierce north-westerly wind, and their cry came brokenly back to us through it like the fragments of the chimes through the turmoil of Tschaikowsky's "1812" symphony. The young horse began to realise that there was something in it, and, with a monster and frog-like leap, flew over the ensuing heathery bank, landing, shatteringly, on all fours. We were travelling down hill, a fact that involved heavy drops, but involved also the privilege, rare for me, of seeing the hounds comfortably. Lily, leading the rest by half a field, was going great guns, so were Flurry and Hickey, so, I may say with all modesty, were the young horse and I. After an eventful and entirely satisfactory ten minutes of racing over the class of country that has, on a low average, seventeen jumps to the mile, we skated down a greasy path, and found ourselves in a deep lane, with the hounds at fault, casting themselves eagerly right and left. It was here that we came upon Michael, a dolorous

spectacle, leading his mare towards us. She was dead lame.

"What happened her?" shouted Flurry through the rioting wind.

"The foot's dropping off her, sir," replied Michael, with his usual optimism.

"Well, get away home with her as quick as you can," interrupted Flurry, accepting the diagnosis with the usual discount of 90 per cent. "What way did those white hounds go?"

"The last I seen o' them they were heading west over the hill beyond for Drummig. It might be he was making for an old fort that's back in the land there behind Donovan's farm. There was a fellow driving a bread van above in the road there that told me if the hounds got inside in the fort we'd never see them again. He said there were holes down in it that'd go from here to the sea."

"What the devil good were you that you didn't stop those hounds?" said Flurry, cutting short this harangue with a countenance as black as the weather. "Here, come on!" he called to Hickey and me, "the road'll be the quickest for us."

It was about a mile by the road to Donovan's farm, and as Hickey and I pounded along in the rear of the disgusted hounds, big pellets of rain were flung in our faces, and I began to realise, not for the first time, that to turn up the collar of one's coat is more of a protest than a protection.

The farmhouse of Donovan of Drummig was

connected with the high road by the usual narrow and stony lane; as we neared the entrance of the lane we saw through the swirls of rain a baker's van bumping down it. There were two men on the van, and in the shafts was a raking young brown horse, who, having espied the approach of the hounds, was honouring them with what is politically known as a demonstration. One of the men held up his hand, and called out a request to "hold on awhile till they were out on to the road."

"Did you see any hounds?" shouted Flurry, holding back the hounds, as the van bounded round the corner and into the main road, with an activity rare in its species.

"We did, sir," returned the men in chorus, clinging to the rail of their knifeboard seat, like the crew of a racing yacht, "they have him back in the fort above this minute! Ye can take your time, faith!"

The van horse reared and backed, and Flurry turned in his saddle to eye him as he ramped ahead in response to a slash from the driver; so did Dr. Hickey, and so also did Lily, who, with her white nose in the air, snuffed inquisitively in the wake of the departing van.

"You'd say she knew a good one when she saw him," said Hickey as we turned the hounds into the lane.

"Or a good loaf of bread," I suggested.

"It's little bread that lad carries!" answered

Hickey, thonging the reluctant Lily on; "I'll go bail, there's as much bottled porter as bread in that van! He supplies half the shebeens in the country."

As we splashed into the farmyard a young man threw open a gate at its farther side, shouting to Flurry to hurry on. He waved us on across a wide field, towards a low hill or mound, red with wet withered bracken, and crested by a group of lean fir trees, flinging their arms about in the wild gusts of wind and rain.

"The fox wasn't the length of himself in front of them!" shouted the young man, running beside us, "and he as big as a donkey! The whole kit of them is inside in the fort together!"

Flurry turned his horse suddenly.

"Two and a half couple underground is enough for one while," he said, riding back into the farmyard. "Have you any place I could shove these hounds into?"

The door of a cow-house was open, and as if in anticipation of his wishes, the hounds jostled emulously into the darkness within. Again, guided by the young man, we faced the storm and rain. What Flurry's intentions were we neither knew nor dared to ask, and, as we followed him over the soaked fields, a back more expressive of profound and wrathful gloom it has never been my lot to contemplate.

The place in which the fox and the Irish hounds

had entombed themselves, was one of the prehistoric earthen fortresses that abound in the south-west of Ireland. The fort at Drummig was like a giant flat-topped molehill ; the spade work of a forgotten race had turned it into a place of defence, and, like moles, they had burrowed into its depths. The tongue of the young man who guided us did not weary in the recital of the ways, and the passages, and the little rooms that were within in it. He said that a calf belonging to himself was back in it for a week, and she came out three times fatter than the day she went in. He also, but with a certain diffidence, mentioned fairies.

Round and about this place of mystery went Flurry, blowing long and dreary blasts at the mouths of its many holes, uttering "Gone-away" screeches, of a gaiety deplorably at variance with his furious countenance. A more pessimistic priest never trumpeted round the walls of a more impracticable Jericho.

Hickey led the dripping horses to and fro in the lee of the fort, and I was deputed to listen at a rabbit hole from which the calf was said to have emerged. After a period of time which I was too much deadened by misery to compute, Flurry appeared, and told me that he was going home. Judging from his appearance, he had himself been to ground ; what he said about the white hounds and the weather was very suitable, but would not read as well as it sounded.

We returned to the farmyard with the wind and rain chivying us from behind.

"I asked a man, one time," said Dr. Hickey, as side by side, and at a well-maintained distance, we followed our leader across the field, "why his father had committéd suicide, and he said, 'Well, your honour, he was a little annoyed.' I'm thinking, Major, it'd be no harm for us to keep an eye on Flurry."

I stooped my head to let the water flow out of the brim of my hat.

"You needn't neglect me either," I said.

While Hickey was getting the hounds out of the cow-house, my young horse shivered with cold, and gave an ominous cough. I reflected upon the twelve long miles that lay between him and home, and asked our saturated guide if I could get a warm drink for him. There was no difficulty about that; to be sure I could and welcome. I abandoned my comrades; regret, if it were felt, was not expressed by Flurry. When the hounds had paddled forth from the cow-house I put my horse into it, and before they had accomplished half a mile of their direful progress, I was standing with my back to a glowing turf fire, with my coat hanging on a chair, and a cup of scalding tea irradiating the inmost recesses of my person.

My hostess, Mrs. Jeremiah Donovan, was a handsome young woman, tall, fair, and flushed, agonised with hospitality, shy to ferocity. The

family dog was lifted from the hearth with a side kick worthy of an International football match; her offspring, clustered, staring, in the chimney-corner, were dispersed with a scorching whisper, of which the words, "ye brazen tinkers," gave some clue to its general trend. Having immured them in an inner room she withdrew, muttering something about another "goleen o' turf," and I was left alone with an excellent cake of soda-bread and two boiled eggs.

Presently a slight and mouse-like rattle made me aware that one of the offspring, aged about five, had escaped from captivity, and was secretly drawing my whip to him along the floor by the thong.

"What have ye the whip for?" said the offspring, undaunted by discovery.

"To bate the dogs with," I replied, attuning my speech to his as best I could.

"Is it the big white dogs?" pursued the offspring.

I paused midway in a mouthful of soda-bread.

"Did you see the white dogs?" I asked very gently.

"God knows I did!" said the offspring, warming to his work, "an' they snapped the bit o' bread out of Joola's hand within in the cow-house! And Joola said they were a fright!"

I sat still and waited while one might count five, fearful of scaring the bird that had perched so near me.

"Are the white dogs here now?" I ventured wooingly.

"They are not."

The crook of my crop was beginning to prove dangerously engrossing, and the time was short.

"Where did they go?" I persevered.

"Jimmy Mahony and me uncle Lukey took them away in the van," said the offspring with clearness and simplicity, slashing with my whip at a member of the guild of Brazen Tinkers whom I assumed to be the already injured Julia.

. . . . . .

As I bestowed at parting a benefaction upon Jeremiah Donovan, I said that I hoped he would let Mr. Knox know if any of the white hounds came out of the fort. He assured me that he would do so. He was, like his wife, a thoroughly good fellow, and he had wisped the young horse until one would have said he had never been out of the stable.

The storm had blown itself away, and the rain was nearly over. I rode home quietly, and in peace and goodwill towards all men; after all, there was no hurry. This was a thing that was going to last me for the rest of my life, and Flurry's.

I overtook Michael on the way home. Michael said that sure he knew all through it was a drag, and if Mr. Flurry had been said by him, he'd have had neither cut, shuffle, nor deal with them O'Reillys. In the course of his life Michael has never been known to be in the wrong.

Dr. Hickey told me (but this was some time afterwards) that often he had to get out of his bed to laugh, when he thought of Flurry getting Jeremiah Donovan to screech in Irish down the holes in the fort, for fear old O'Reilly's hounds had no English. It is hardly necessary to say that Dr. Hickey also had been convinced by the way the hounds ran that it was a drag, but had omitted to mention the fact at the time.

Flurry was lost to home and country for three days. It was darkly said that he had gone to Fahoura to break every bone in young O'Reilly's body, and, incidentally, to bring back the white hounds. At the end of the three days he telegraphed for a man and a saddle to meet the afternoon train. There was nothing in the telegram about hounds. Next day I met him riding a young brown horse, with a wildish eye, and a nasty rub from a misfitting collar.

"I got him in a sort of a swap," said Flurry tranquilly.

"I suppose he got that rub in the bread-van?" I remarked, drawing a bow at a venture.

"Well, that might be too," assented Flurry, regarding me with an eye that was like a stone wall with broken glass on the top.

THE END.

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